
Mushoku Tensei

– Isekai Ittara Honki Dasu –

– Side Stories –

~ Redundancy Chapter ~

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[Norn's Marriage]

Chapter 1

Norn's Marriage – First Part

Part 1

It's been several months since the conclusion of the battle of the Biheiril Kingdom.

Since then, Hitogami has stayed silent, and the days went by without any enemy presence. That said, what I have to do hasn't changed.

To prepare for Laplace's revival in 80 years, I've been silently moving around, making various arrangements.

But lately, I've been home a lot.

Because both Eris and Roxy got pregnant at the same time.

It has to be because I let loose after Gisu was defeated.

And my disorderly daily life was the result.

Of course, the result itself is something joyous.

But during pregnancy, their fates are weakened and they are easier targets for Hitogami.

I would also like to spend as much time as possible with my wives during their pregnancy.

And so, for the first time in a while, family time has continued.

By organising the information gathered by the Mercenary Groups established in various places, regular meetings were held where Orsted went through the information to determine our future course of action.

On one of those days...

On that day, together with Orsted, we were going over the information on the next country that I would be visiting.

The next king of that country was still young but he was already a remarkable figure, and I was supposed to approach him with the intention of taking advantage of him.

Orsted didn't say what would cause the next king to fall, he kept silent.

He probably has some reason. Is the person that would cause that King's fall not in the current loop?

Originally, we were supposed to meet him later on, at this point, is there any surefire way to topple him?

And so, how should I move?

Orsted said he'd look at his memo relating to him and think of a method.

And that was when it happened.

"Let Norn Greyrat get married."

"Wha.....?"

Sudden.

Orsted suddenly broke the silence by saying something insane.

I, who am normally very careful about my words around Orsted, almost unintentionally leaked out the line: "The hell you saying all of a sudden?"

Right now, we were thinking about how we would cause this remarkable figure to fall.

There was no logical link at all.

Is what I thought.

But no, maybe there wasn't absolutely no link.

There was one possible answer.

"...A political marriage?"

Going by the flow of the conversation, to cause the remarkable figure to fall... that's what we would do.

"Not as a political maneuver, I was thinking about the future."

Nevertheless, it is a painful topic.

Orsted had decided that I would move towards this man with the intention of having him win her heart.

Well that's fine for now.

It's not as if I don't have confidence in this person.

I just don't believe that this remarkable man of lineage could win her heart.

The man is a womanizer on the level of Paul, if we can't find a woman to allot to him, I would have to consent to Orsted's suggestion.

That said.

Norn is out of the question.

Norn will eventually get married.

But, Paul was a peerless womanizer, handing Norn over to the same kind of man is no good.

Norn's partner would need to be someone more sincere.

And somebody that I can accept.

I won't hand Norn over to some useless nobody.

I wouldn't be able to face Paul.

No matter how noble their objective, I will not forgive those who use and discard their family.

"Not like that."

"Then what did you mean?"

"I am indebted to Norn Greyrat's child."

"Debt...? So it's not Norn that you are interested in, but her child, whom you have business with?"

"It's not business. In this loop, it's not all that important."

It was not a very pertinent conversation.

Not being able to read Orsted's true intentions was not a new thing.

But up until now, I've at least been able to determine what he was trying to do.

Groundwork for the future.

Norn's child isn't important, but because in a previous loop he/she was useful, he would like to set the groundwork.

“I understand.”

I stood up.

He looked up at me while sitting.

He's not currently wearing his helmet. His face is scary as always but, but I'm sure right now it's even more frightening.

“If it must be so by all means, would it be permissible to meet at noon in the forest to the north of here in three days time?”

Norn, rest easy.

I will protect your chastity,

Even if the opponent is Orsted, I will not pull back a single step.

So Paul... lend me your strength.

I ask you for the power to overcome this mighty enemy and return home alive.

“Wait. You are misunderstanding something.”

“Misunderstanding?”

“During the countless 200 years I have repeated, I have become attached to certain persons' existences.

Norn Greyrat's child is one such existence.

She has helped me on countless occasions, I am indebted to her.

Therefore, if it is possible, I would like to meet her in this lifetime.

Because as it is, it will not happen.”

It's true that there's no male presence around Norn.

That didn't change even after her graduation.

She has her family, but she isn't jobless.

On the recommendation of the school, she entered the Magic Guild and is now working at the main office.

She is what you would call an “Office Lady.”.

There are a considerable number of men in the Magic Guild.

But there is no male presence around Norn.

She doesn't go out on her days off and spends all her time at home helping out by looking after the kids or doing housework.

Even during her schooldays, she had no one special that she associated with.

I thought Norn would eventually but, honestly, if it goes on this way, it seems like she might spend her whole life without getting married.

“ ... ”

In this world, for those of certain positions, arranged marriages are a common practice.

It may be half-hearted, but I am technically a man of notable position with both influence and connections.

With that being the case, this development isn't all that odd.

“...No, a child isn't something you can make on your own.

The same person couldn't be born no matter who the partner is.”

The King of a country would have a high enough standing.

But I do not intend to acknowledge it.

Until I see it with my own eyes, and confirm what kind of person they are.

“That aside, was this remarkable figure originally Norn's partner?”

While I was thinking that, Orsted scrunched his face up in confusion and raised his eyebrows.

As always his face is scary.

But I remember this face, it's the “The hell you saying all of a sudden” face.

He opened his mouth and his suppressed eyebrows moved.

“No... Sorry. That has nothing to do with this.”

“Huh?”

“This is a different story.”

A different story...

Then it's that.

“It's not about conquering the next kingdom? You were simply saying to let Norn get married at the time of her choosing?”

“That's how it is.”

Right.

I get it now, that makes sense.

“Orsted-sama.”

“Yes?”

“When you are changing the subject of the conversation, please say something along the lines of “I'm changing the subject of the conversation.” or “That aside,” it would be good for you to preface such conversations like this.”

“Right. I'll be more careful next time.”

After putting everything back in place, I sat back down.

Part 2

After I pulled myself together, the conversation continued.

"So, just who was Norn's partner?

Norn married this person each and every time, didn't she?"

"Yes, as far as I know, Norn's partner is predetermined."

Norn's fated partner.

What a lucky guy.

Simply by existing, to have the good fortune of being able to marry Norn.

If he spends his days lazing around, I'll kidnap him and fix it.

Spartan training.

From dawn till dusk, I'll force it into him.

Until his body can say nothing but, 'Yes', 'Absolutely' and "Thank you very much, cheating will not be tolerated.

The condition will be, let's see... If he would like to become Norn's partner, he would at least have to be able to stay conscious after taking a punch from Eris.

"It's Ruijerd Supardia."

My thoughts stopped.

Inside my head, I remembered the face of a bald warrior who had lived for over 500 years.

No, he's not bald anymore.

He is a respectable man with a with splendid green hair.

"Their child is the last warrior of the supard race.

Continuing the will of Ruijerd after he had fallen to the plague, reclaiming the Supard's honour by joining the humans side in the fight against Laplace and delivering the final blow.

It was a huge burden that anybody would recognize...

But this time around, the Supard race remains in large numbers.

"That child will most likely not have to be burdened with this duty."

While I was still arranging my thoughts, Orsted finished his explanation.

He was probably remembering that child's whole life.

If she defeated Laplace, that means that she most likely co-operated with Orsted.

Which means, right, for Orsted to make this kind of proposal, I do understand it.

"..."

But, well.

This time is different

I'm here, there was also the Teleport Incident.

I don't know how Ruijerd and Norn got to know each other in the other loops,

But there is no mistake that this is a love story that Orsted is well aware of.

If I were to suddenly approach Norn with talks of marriage she would most likely just turn me down.

After all, he's 500 years old.

Ruijerd would probably be bewildered too.

Having Ruijerd as a relative definately wouldn't be a bad thing.

But this definitely isn't something for me to decide.

Umu.

"...I think that Norn's feeling are the most important."

"That's right. There's no need to rush."

Orsted said that and nodded in agreement.

Part 3

After that, I had Orsted tell me Norn's story from the previous loops.

In a world without me, it seems Norn became an adventurer.

She sang songs and wrote stories while adventuring; a singing, dancing, fighting, minstrel. She formed a party with those of similar interests, and journeyed towards the northern continent.

Although neither her swordsmanship nor her magic were, by any means, outstanding.

By adventurer standards she was at best a B grade.

And so, during a certain request, her party was annihilated by a demonic creature.

Norn was also on the verge of death.

What appeared then was our Ruijerd.

He beat down the approaching demonic creature and freed Norn from her predicament.

And to Norn, Ruijerd was love at first sight.

And from then on, she accompanied Ruijerd on his journey to find the Supard race, and slowly began her attack.

Apparently Ruijerd ignored her advances at first, but after he discovered that the Supard race had been wiped out by a plague, he fell into despair.

Norn devoted herself to comforting the anguished Ruijerd, he was moved by her affection, and the two got married.

The two of them began their life together in a corner of the Biheilil kingdom.

And during that time, while Norn was pregnant with their child, Ruijerd fell sick with the same illness that struck the Supard race and died.

Norn, now alone, took upon herself, the responsibility of raising the child, and eventually her life came to an end.

I thought it sounded like a lonely end, but according to Orsted, Norn looked satisfied on her deathbed.

It was an unexpected and unlikely love story, but with the two of them, nothing would be strange.

That said, I wonder how Norn and Ruijerd would get together without such a chain of events.

Would Norn be happy, being paired with somebody she didn't love?

Would Ruijerd accept?

“...”

Well, there's no point to me toiling over it alone.

What's important are Norn's feelings.

There may be no male presence around Norn, but she is at that age.

She's got to have a man or two she likes, having been in a relationship or two wouldn't be odd.

No, it may just be that I don't know, she may already have herself a man.

And one day, all of a sudden, she might bring a man to the house and he would ask me

“Father-in-law, please give your daughter to me”.

And then I would reply “Who's this ‘Father-in-law’”.

And then: “I am ‘brother-in-law’”...

I got sidetracked.

Anyhow, I must first hear Norn's feelings.

At these times, I get the feeling that this isn't something I should hear.

I also don't think it's something that Norn would tell me.

A woman would be better.

But Aisha is no good.

I feel like if Aisha hears this it'll turn into something bad.

Which means, it would have to be Sylphy or maybe Roxy.

Norn seems to respect Roxy in particular, Roxy would be good.

On the subject of admiration, Eris would also be good.

Eris had been teaching Norn the sword for quite a while.

Ever since Norn graduated, she's been going jogging and doing practice swings with Eris every morning.

It's clear to see that Norn looks up to her.

But with Eris's commando personality, telling her to "Ask indirectly" would be impossible. It would have to be Roxy.

No wait, Someone with a high skill level at "Asking indirectly" would be Sylphy.

She looks up to Sylphy in a slightly different sense than admiration, but at the very least, she does recognise that she's the most important member of the household.

No, I should probably discuss it with all three present.

Four with me included, and we can decide who would be most suited.

It would be good to hear Sylphy and Roxy's opinions.

Wait, wait, not just the three of them, would it be better to bring Lillia and Zenith in on it too?

"..."

I was sitting on the living room sofa, thinking about it by myself when...

Into my field of vision jumped a single woman.

"Ah."

It's Norn.

Norn walked into the Living room.

"Nii-san, I'm home."

"...Welcome back."

When you take a good look, all said, Norn is actually quite the beauty.

She looks a lot like Zenith when she was young.

Her breasts are large and she's got silky blonde hair.

Even at school she was popular.

“...What is it?”

“No... Ah, Norn, you want some tea?”

“I’ll have some.”

I took a cup from the table and poured out some black tea and handed it to her.

Norn took the cup and looked puzzled.

“...It’s cold now.”

“Eeh!”

Even though I just had Lillia brew it?

I thought that and touched the teapot, and it was indeed cold.

The cup in my hand was also cold.

I wonder what happened.

Are we under some kind of attack!?

“...Huh? Norn, that reminds me, don’t you have work today?”

“I just got home from there now.”

I took a look out the window and it was already evening.

After I returned from my meeting with Orsted and had Lillia brew me some tea, it was early afternoon, which means that around two hours have passed.

“Ah, sorry, it seems I spaced out.”

“Please save the spacing out for when you’re older... I’ll go make some fresh tea. You wait here.”

“...Huh? Is no one else here?”

Until a little while ago, Sylphy and Eris were still here.

And Roxy should also be home around this time.

“I walked past Sylphy-Neesan and Eris-Neesan on my way home, they were taking the kids for a walk. Lillia-san was shopping.”

“...Aisha?”

“I don’t know. Wouldn’t she probably still be with the mercenary group?”

As she said that, Norn walked into the kitchen with the Teapot.

But is that right, nobody else is here.

It’s just Norn and I...

Couldn’t this be called some kind of perfect situation.

Hm.

Avoid a roundabout wordy conversation and tell her to her face.

And if that should fail, I’ll try something else.

That would be the option most faithful to Norn.

Hmm. Hmm.

Talking to her only after I had removed all the obstacles, Norn wouldn’t like that.

After all, it’s her that’s getting married.

I’ll hear it from Norn first.

“Here you go.”

“Thanks.”

As I thought that, Norn had returned and placed a teacup in front of me.

I sat right in front of Norn and drank from the cup.

“You’ve gotten quite good at making tea.”

“I learnt it in school after all.”

“Not from Lillia-san?”

“Lillia-san... probably wouldn’t teach me.”

Rather than not teaching you, she’d most likely tell you to ‘Let me do it’.

“If you asked, I think she’d still teach you.”

“Probably, but they had a class at school, so I thought I might as well learn it there. Also, there aren’t many opportunities to make tea at home, but there are plenty at school.”

“That’s true.”

Like at the student council and in her dorm room.

Maybe even at work.

Well, it’s just something Norn decided herself.

“...”

We’re having a casual conversation to warm up to the topic, but I would like to cut right to it.

What should I say.

What do I talk about.

“Ah-... Ahem....”

“...”

I cleared my throat and Norn gave me a puzzled look.

“...Is there something missing?”

“No, not that, hmm. The tea is good.”

I said that and took another sip of the steaming tea.

It wasn’t particularly great, but at the same time it’s not bad enough to spit out.

It’s very Norn-like, mediocre tea.

Good, but not skilled, that kind of feeling.

In other words, it’s good.

That aside...

“Lately, Norn, recently... How’s it been?”

“How what been?”

“Hmm, for instance, how about work?”

“Everything’s normal. While being taught by my senpai, I’ve been doing the jobs I’m capable of. But, I’m sure if it was Aisha, she’d be far better than me.”

“Stop comparing yourself to Aisha.”

I said that and Norn nodded.

Aisha does a different kind of work.

You shouldn’t compare yourself to someone doing a different job.

“And, your senpai... are they that? Are they cool?”

“They’re super pretty. You’ve talked to them once before as well Nii-san. When I was the student council president, they was the vice-president.”

“...That tough beast race one?”

“Not him, the girl.”

Right, the woman.

I get it.

I don’t remember her name, but there was definitely someone like that.

Now that I think about it, when she was looking for a job, I remember having a conversation like that.

Like that they had entered the same department.

“Right, a girl... I wonder if there are any male senpai?”

“There are.”

“Those male senpai... Are there any good looking ones?”

“There are some good looking ones, and some who aren’t as well.”

There seems to be someone cool.

That’s important.

“Nii-san, what have you been wanting to say?”

“Calm down Norn. Don’t jump to any conclusions.”

“It looks like you’re the one that need to calm down.”

I am calm.

I'm always, Cool, Clever and Clean.
Rudeus of the three C's.
Never Crazy, that word is not in there.

"So, Norn... Ahem, Say, if, um, do you think, this cool person, is, uh, cool?"

"You're wondering if I like him?"

"Do you like him?"

Ahh, dammit.

I suddenly jumped straight to the point.

"I don't particularly like him."

Hey, mama yo!

"Then do you have somebody you like?"

".....There is."

There is!

She answered, now, in the flow of the conversation!

She answered me honestly.

She gave me an answer.

"Yes, right! There is, well you're at that age. So there is someone, there's nothing odd about that. Yes."

"But you were most definitely odd just then."

"What are you saying."

There's nothing odd about me.

What's odd is this world.

This world is wrong. Don't you agree.

"So, what kind of person are they? The person you like."

"...He's older."

“Hmm.”

“And reliable.”

“MmmHmm.”

“And he’s always looking out for me.”

He fulfils all three conditions.

“Could it be me?”

“Are you half-asleep?”

I’m sorry.

I got ahead of myself.

“He’s far older than you, Nii-san, and even in this situation he would be calm; he is a composed man of presence.”

“You know, your brother, recently, hasn’t been getting flustered at all.”

“Please remember your manner from a few minutes ago.”

Grrr...

But, hmm, far older than me, a man of presence. Dammit.

“Far older... Is that more than 10 years?”

“Even more.”

“...I didn’t expect you to be into old men.”

“To say I’m ‘into old men’... Well I will admit that I like men older than me.”

Even more would be more than 20 years older than me.

Meaning 40 or 50 years old.

And on top of that, having a presence, he might be rather plump.

A lower centre of gravity would cause a sense of stability and presence.

“ ... ”

The corrupt head of some trading company or some sly greasy old man, was the image that floated into my mind.

I don't intend to criticise because of an age difference, but I can only see this man as some kind of sugar daddy.

I won't acknowledge it, I definitely won't acknowledge something like that.

But if this greasy old man turns out to be surprisingly sincere... Then the age difference is of no concern.

You can't judge a book by its cover.

"But I understand that it's a love that is not meant to be."

"Not meant to be... Is he married?"

"No... His wife is already gone..."

She's already dead.

Or perhaps divorced.

It's possible that he simply had a letter of divorce thrust before him.

Wait, I seem to have gotten forcefully sidetracked, what if...

"But apparently, I'm quite similar to his dead wife."

Aah, then I'm definitely wrong.

I would have to be wrong.

That man wouldn't say such a thing.

"That's a pretty cliché pick-up line."

To get a hold of someone much younger than you, saying that 'you're similar to my wife', of course it's a cliché pick-up line.

It brings in the possibility of marriage.

No, wait, now that I think about it, it doesn't sound like a pick-up line.

You're completely different to my wife, this is the first time I've met someone like you, something like that sounds much closer to a pick-up line.

“Eeh... I’m being picked up?”

Norn’s brought her hands to her cheeks they became somewhat red.

She’s happy about being picked up.

Right, it’s not the other party, Norn is the one that likes him.

But there’s still the possibility that Norn is being tricked.

But I’m sure that if I said that to Norn right now it’d start a fight, so I wont.

“Anyway, why did you ask something like that so suddenly?”

“Eh? No, umm.”

“You must have some kind of reason.”

Norn began to scowl at me.

She’s talked with me honestly until now, so I should also answer honestly, is the kind of face she’s giving me right now.

I didn’t think you’d talk with me honestly to this point.

But I just wanted to confirm if she had someone that she likes.

“...It might be awkward to say this after the conversation we just had.”

“Yes.”

Norn, who had been leant forward until now, sat back slightly.

“The truth is Norn, talk about your engagement has come up.”

After hearing that, Norn froze for several seconds.

Eye’s wide open and mouth turned down at the corners.

She carefully examined me.

“A marriage proposal... I understand. I’ll accept it.”

“No, I get it. Don’t say any more, let’s pretend this conversation never happened.”

“No, like I said, I’ll accept.”

I looked at Norn.

She looked quite suspicious of me if I do say so myself.

“...Don’t you have someone you like?”

“That’s fine. It’s a love that can’t be after all.

I’m not a noble, but since Nii-san is in some kind of position of nobility, I thought this kind of conversation would happen eventually, I’ve heard it from people I know as well.

From when I heard that you were making connections with other countries, I assumed I would be used this way.”

“Don’t say things like being used. I have no intention of using my family like tools.”

In response to my rather strong tone, Norn was taken aback and apologised.

“Right... I’m sorry.”

She’s an honest girl.

“Norn, if you say you don’t like it, we can forget this conversation happened.”

“No... I’m not particularly against it. The fact that you’d even bring the conversation to me means that they’re definitely not someone I’d hate, right?.”

“Well, yeah.”

I don’t think he’s someone you’d hate...

After the battle at the Biheilil Kingdom the two seemed to get along.

No matter where he is, Ruijerd is an sincere man.

Well, I still haven’t gotten Ruijerd’s acknowledgement yet.

But he probably wouldn’t object.

“But... Hmm. It’s not as if I absolutely want to get married, but it’s not as if I don’t either. If you say that it’s ok then I would like to take you up on your offer of ignoring this talk. But if you insist, I wouldn’t mind continuing the conversation.”

Norn said that and averted her eyes.

Like I thought, she doesn’t particularly want to get married.

It’s only that she’d do what I say.

That may be something good for me, but for Norn, it's not.

"No, I haven't even talked to the other party. So It's alright."

"Is that right... Thank you very much."

If Norn says that, Orsted probably won't be too happy about it.

"...Ahh, by the way, what kind of person were they? The king of some country? Some Asuran Noble?"

"They aren't Royalty or Nobility... It's somebody you know."

"Somebody I know...? Aah, Was it Zanoba-senpai by any chance?"

"I don't think that guy would be interested in marriage."

Zanoba is something else.

He exuberates such a lovey dovey atmosphere around Juli but he doesn't seem to be getting any closer to Ginger.

He probably intends to remain married to his dolls for life.

"It's Ruijerd."

I told her the name of the partner.

"..."

By the time I had realised, Norn had placed her hands on the table and bent forward.

She had a serious face.

Her face was red and she seemed angry.

I wonder if I hurt her feelings.

Norn looks up to Ruijerd with respect, but as I thought, it's not like that.

Yeah. Sorry, Nii-san was mistaken.

"We-well, of course it's a no. Putting aside the difference in race, the age gap is just too big, even you—"

“Nii-san! Please proceed with that engagement!”

Norn cut off my words, without concealing the excitement and joy from her voice.

Part 4

After all that.

Or should I say, as expected.

It seems the person Norn liked was Ruijerd.

She had looked up to him ever since she was little.

That admiration from childhood eventually grew into love, and the incident in the Biheilil Kingdom re-awoke it.

I like this person.

But after hearing about his past, she was convinced that she couldn't be with him, and decided to hide her feelings.

“I understand leave it to your Onii-chan.”

After hearing all that, I hit my chest.

Author Q&A

Q: Before you said it would be 1-2 chapter in a month and now it's 2 in one day!

You always exceed expectations. Magonote-san salute!

A: Although for now, the first three chapters are just Norn's story.

After that's over it'll be around another month.

I return you're salute.

Q: Returning to the 「In a Sense」

I have waited.

A: Rather than a return, I would like you to think of it as an end-game event.

Q: Guehehe... Marraige?

Onii-chan will always support you!

Becoming a bride is unthinkable!

Is what I had thought..._(┐ 「ε:」_

A: To begin with, Rudeus is also a married person.

Q: Is such an older brother alright?

I have a bad feeling lol

A feeling of fruitless effort...!

It's a problem, Rudeus doesn't at all feel reliable.

Very unreliable.

A: Is this what you take away from 2,800,000 characters!

Q: Norn-chan's wedding... This is... Teren-san reads this... wouldn't it turn into something bad?

A: Let those who will sing, sing.

Chapter 2

Norn's Marriage – Second Part

Part 1

Leave it to me.

I said that and began the preparations for the marriage.

Norn has given an affirmative response, the problem lies on Ruijerd's side.

He is an adult. If I asked him to marry my sister, he would most likely agree to it.

Thinking logically, marrying my family is also to the benefit of the Supard race.

Objectively, looking at my title, I am a trusted retainer of the Dragon God.

Since ancient times, marriage has been a way of deepening strength of an alliance.

With Ruijerd and Norn's marriage, the Supard race won't oppose the Dragon God faction, and we would no longer have to cast them away.

That's the proposal I have prepared.

It is a happy proposal.

But is that really alright?

Would that make Norn happy?

If Ruijerd married her thinking "It can't be helped", would Norn be satisfied?

When she realises that she isn't loved back, she will most likely break into tears.

Ruijerd is currently in Biheilil Kingdom, in charge of negotiations.

Which means that Norn wouldn't live in the Magic City Sharia any longer and would move to the Supard village.

After the incident in the Biheilil Kingdom, the whole village knows her name and face, So the villagers would most likely accept her.

But, while living with a race other than your own, the common sense and daily lifestyle would be different. Would Norn be able to make a good living?

Worst case, Norn would be ostracised from the villagers.

I'm worried.

Very worried.

I asked my three wives for advice on the issue:

Roxy said: "If it's Norn, she'll be fine."

Eris said: "If it's Ruijerd, she'll be fine."

Sylphy said: "You're overthinking this."

But I am still worried.

I cannot allow Norn to meet with misfortune.

If Norn were to spend her days crying, Paul would glare at me in my dreams, and Zenith would be standing at my bedside slapping me awake from my peaceful sleep.

For both their sake, I must make sure Norn is on the road to happiness.

Anything after that is up to Norn herself.

Of course, I understand that Ruijerd is a man worthy of my faith.

Even if he didn't love Norn from the bottom of his heart, I know that he would treat his wife properly.

He would care for her in a way that would never cause her to cry.

But I still have to confirm this with Ruijerd.

No matter how much Ruijerd might not love Norn.

Even if I must prepare some kind of event to have them get along better.

It should be possible to have Ruijerd's feelings for Norn turn around.

And then everything should reach a Happy End.

"...Alright."

And so, with that, I arrived at the Supard village in Biheilil Kingdom.

The Supard village, a few months into reconstruction, already looked complete.

The village was surrounded by large trees and on the inside, houses were lined up in rows.

They hadn't harvested yet, but there were crops growing in the field.

When the Supard warriors saw me, they bowed their heads and kindly led me into the village.

After I gave an appropriate greeting in response, we quickly made our way to Ruijerd's house.

Of course, it was a new building.

Ruijerd held a rather significant standing in this village, so his house was large.

Yup, it's more than enough for two people to live.

"...Ruijerd-san, are you in?"

"Oh, Rudeus."

Ruijerd was inside.

It seemed he had just finished eating, he was sitting next to the fire place in the centre of the room with his eyes closed in some kind of state of meditation.

"..."

I went and sat down in front of him in seiza.

Ruijerd opened his eyes and gave me a puzzled look.

"...What's wrong?"

As he asked me, I turned my palm towards Ruijerd.

"Please wait a minute, I'm still choosing my words."

"...Alright."

And so I kept my silence.

While sitting there staring at the flickering fire, it felt like nearly an hour had passed. It may sound odd, but I couldn't think of anything to start with.

I know what I must say.

Ruijerd's feeling for Norn.

Whether he likes her or dislikes her and what he thinks of her a marriage partner.

But I don't know how to word it.

How about:

'How do you feel about marrying Norn?'

No, marriage and feelings are separate issues. I can't forget that.

"..."

Ruijerd didn't try to start a conversation with me as I was sitting in silence.

He was waiting for me to start talking.

As if to say that there was absolutely no need to rush, that I should choose my words at ease.

I don't know whether or not he has some business to take care of, but he probably doesn't have anything to do.

Most likely, he acts this way towards Norn as well.

Or it's possible that Norn may think of this attitude of his a little irritating.

No, probably not.

The very reason Norn fell in love with Ruijerd was because of this particular trait of him.

A partner not bothered by silence is a valuable thing.

Although I'm agonising a little over it now.

"...Right, recently, Norn has been making tea, she's gotten quite good."

"Hmm, Norn's tea."

I said that fishing for a response, and Ruijerd replied.

As I thought, he is somewhat interested in Norn.

So is the first condition clear...?

No, wait, when a man who has been sitting in silence for an hour says something, no matter what it's about, you would reply.

Don't rush.

It's about the flow of the conversation.

"It seems that because she's been making it at her workplace, she's gotten better."

"Is that so... When she came to the village before, it was good."

Ruijerd closed his eyes as if he was remembering something.

Is that so, it seems Ruijerd has already had Norn's tea.

It was good he says.

Putting it like that means that he would probably like to try it again.

Is he thinking something like "I'd like her to make me tea everyday..."?

Damn it, how should I ask him.

I want a choice list.

Is this how Orsted feels when he's talking with me?

Then should I just tell him outright?

How should I do it!? Just how should I ask!?

"It's not just her tea, her cooking isn't bad either."

While I was toiling, the conversation continued.

The conversation kept flowing.

The flow did not stop.

But wait, what did he just say?

Cooking?

"Have you tried it?"

"Yes."

Norn's cooking?

Even though I've never had it before?

"Is that so..."

I wonder what she made.

Beef stew or curry or omurice or maybe even beef stroganoff.

I want to try it too.

I want to eat it.

No, I have to set myself aside for now.

But in any case, if he likes her cooking then that means it's not hopeless.

Her cooking won't make one's mouth water, but it seems that she's not that awful.

And after they get married, we won't be seeing Ruijerd getting slim.

"Is something the matter with Norn?"

While I was thinking, Ruijerd had asked that.

It was a reasonable assumption.

No, I suddenly came in here with a serious face and started talking about Norn, what I want to talk about should be obvious.

"No... It's not that anything's particularly the matter, it was small talk."

But I'm still lacking the courage, resolve and guts to cut right to the point.

Do you like Norn? Do you love her? Do you Immediately want to hold her?

I'm afraid I would hear back: "I don't think of her her like that at all, I can't marry her, even if I did I wouldn't be able to love her."

And if I did, I'm sure I'd be shocked.

And I'm sure I'd say something like "Just what about Norn doesn't suit you!" and pick a fight.

"It's just that, Norn is also growing up, and she already has a job. She still has plenty of time for children... But there isn't even any kind of male presence around her. I was just wondering if she'll be able to properly get married."

I said that and looked at Ruijerd.

Was that too blunt?

Ruijerd was looking at me suspiciously.

“...Isn’t it a custom of the human race for the head of the family to pick marriage partners? Can you not decide who Norn’s partner will be?”

“No, no, no, I’m not a noble. I think it would be a good thing for Norn to be able to find her own partner, yes.”

I keep taking glances at Ruijerd, but his expression doesn’t change.

No, a bit of severity has been added to his suspicious gaze.

Does he think I’m being irresponsible?

“But of course! If Norn comes along and bring back some good for nothing, I would drag him out to a desert and tell him “If you want Norn, you have to defeat me!”

I won't hand Norn over to some useless nobody!”

I make a hurried explanation.

While I push the matter with Norn it would be bad to have him think me to be irresponsible.

I don’t know how it will be bad, but it will.

“So basically, if someone would like to marry Norn, they would have to defeat you?”

“No...! Something like that won't always be necessary! But! Just, hmm, right, guts... Yes, they would have to show me that they have the guts to do it.”

Someone who would lose their nerve under pressure and run away is no good.

I cannot entrust Norn to someone like that.

I also often lose my nerve, but I at least have no intention of running away.

They must have the guts to still fight even if they know they’ll lose.

“Is that right?”

“Yes.”

Of course, Ruijerd is good on that front.

I keep glancing at Ruijerd to try and tell him what I mean, but his expression doesn't change.

Just his stone like gaze.

It seems he's not interested in Norn after all.

“...”

Well, of course.

To him, Norn is just a child.

From childhood, he had only known her as a frail little girl.

Ruijerd couldn't hold those kind of passionate feeling for a child. He's just that kind of man.

“Ruijerd-san... I'll get right to the point.”

“Ah.”

But I still have to hear it.

Even if it's a sad outcome for Norn.

I cannot decide based just on the look on his face

I am also prepared.

“What do you think of Norn?”

“...”

Ruijerd is silent.

He silently stares intensely at me.

His face is like stone, truly intense.

His suspicion completely disappears.

“...”

That's odd.

Normally Ruijerd would immediately reply in this kind of situation.

A child or a warrior.

It should be one of these two.

“...Do you like Norn?”

I am prepared.

The words that will begin it.

It may have been something that I shouldn't have said.

It may have been something that Norn should have said herself.

“I see.”

As Ruijerd uttered those short words, he stood up as if he had decided something, and took his spear into his hand.

“...Rudeus, outside.”

I understood the meaning of that action, and looked up at him.

Towards me still bewildered on the ground, Ruijerd once again, said in a harsh tone:

“Outside.”

“...Yes.”

To that impact, denying a reply, I readily obeyed.

Part 2

We traveled roughly 10 minutes from the Supard village into the forest surrounding the Earth Dragon Valley.

Deep into the Forest.

Here in a small clearing, Ruijerd and I face each other.

“ ... ”

Ruijerd had a stern face the entire time.

I might have made him mad.

After that conversation, it's no surprise that conveying Norn's feeling to him was a failure.

Or he might have just misunderstood.

As some form of political manoeuvre, I was presenting him with Norn.

If it's Ruijerd,

He'd say like a man, “As her brother you must protect Norn. You mustn't use her to curry favour.”

It's because he's reliable like that, that I can trust him.

“You already noticed it a while back.”

But what came out of Ruijerd's mouth was outside of my predictions.

“ ... ? ”

What have I noticed?

I, who am currently standing here in confusion?

I, who cannot even guess what is right by any standard?

“What?”

“Don't say any more, here I come!”

It seems there's no use in talking.

I had no reason to have my precognition eye open, and without it, I had no way to see Ruijerd's movements.

“—Wah!”

Ruijerd closed in in an instant and I was thrown to the ground.

But opposed to ten years ago, I knew what to do.

Thanks to my regular training, I managed a last minute response.

Ruijerd came at me with his spear from the right, and I raised the right hand of the Magic Armor MK. II to guard.

But Ruijerd then came around with a low kick which I blocked, and then used that leg as a pivot and kicked around with his other leg to knock me down.

“How's that?”

Ruijerd thrust his spear at the back of my neck and looked down at me expressionlessly.

“I concede. Splendid skills.”

I have no idea what's going on.

But I can't say anything else.

I don't think he'd stab my neck, but it's obviously my loss.

“Is this sufficient?”

What's he talking about?

Is what sufficient?

“Isn't it me that's insufficient?”

“...Then, is this enough?”

I don't know what's enough but in this situation he's not lacking anything.
No matter what I say it would still be uncouthly.

“This is enough.”

As I said that, Ruijerd, moved his spear out of the way.
I raised my body up and sat down.
And looked up at Ruijerd with with my pathetic face.

“Then as promised, I get your sister.”

And then Ruijerd said something odd.
He gets my sister?
What about my sister?

Was there that kind of promise?
Huh?
What were we talking about?
I seem to have lost sight of the conversation.

“It's just as you suspected.”

What did I suspect?

“I have fallen in love with Norn.”
“Fallen in love...”

I desperately tried to remember the meaning of that phrase.
If I remember correctly... It's a feeling. A feeling of longing for someone.

“...Huh?”

Which means that Ruijerd likes Norn?

No, wait, don't jump ahead.

Misunderstanding are my weakness.

“So Ruijerd-san, you like Norn?”

“.....I like her.”

Am I being pranked?

Should I happily say, “Then I'll let you marry Norn”.

And then when I go and bring Norn along in a white kimono, Ruijerd will come along with a giant billboard saying “Huge Success”.

That would me a huge mental shock. Norn might even kill herself.

It has to be Hitogami's doing.

Damn it! For Ruijerd to be Hitogami's apostle!

“Is this some kind of joke? Or maybe a punishment game?”

“It is not a joke.”

Ruijerd looked slightly offended by that.

That's right, Ruijerd isn't the type to joke around.

Especially at times like this.

“From when?”

“Several months ago, around the time of the battle in the Biheilil Kingdom. I would like to hold closely, the woman who so devotedly looked after me.”

They did look like they were getting along well together back then.

It couldn't have just been Norn's one sided feelings.

I thought I would be pushing Ruijerd into a marriage, but it seems like it wasn't like that at all.

“Of course, I didn't intend to make a move.”

Which means that if she wasn't my sister, he would have made a move.

Normally he would have made a move.

According to Orsted, that's how it went in the previous loops.

“But you had realised. Which is why you came around with that sudden conversation.”

“...”

That's not why.

All I knew was that Norn liked Ruijerd.

Whoever realised that it was mutual wasn't me.

There's no way I'm that sharp.

I'm the thickheaded type.

My cutting ability is the same as that of a flail.

“I'll say it again. I would like to marry Norn Greyrat.”

Ruijerd said that and pointed his spear at my neck.

“For that purpose, I have shown you my guts.”

So that's what this is.

This is happening because I said that.

A duel to test courage.

But I don't even have the strength needed to witness the extent of Ruijerd's guts.

Well, there's no point in confirming something like that now.

But something like that.

Being more confused than you thought.

And things advancing too well.

Is this a trap?

Just who is trying to entrap who?

I don't get it.

What's going on?

“Umm... Are you alright with your previous wife or your son?”

I don't know and therefore continue questions.

I said that while sitting down and looking up at Ruijerd, and he answered.

“I told you before. I won't be dragged around by my past anymore.”

I do remember him saying it was because there was no one there for him.

Ruijerd looked at me sitting and put down his spear and sat too.

I changed to seiza.

With that, our gazes were the same height.

“Meaning...”

Ruijerd said just that, and hung his head with a difficult face.

“ ... ”

He kept silent.

Having me suddenly appear and exposing his feeling, awakening his resolution, and he brought me all the way out here.

But he was always bad with words.

And on top of that, he probably had a lot of things he wanted to say.

“ ... ”

I was in too much of a hurry.

Even with what Orsted had said, there was no need to immediately set these two up.

I should have used a more indirect plan to bring the two of them together.

Like having Norn kidnapped and Ruijerd rescuing her...

No, the only one who would be charmed by that would be Norn, Ruijerd might fall into a trap.

Wait, if I did that, Norn would hate me.

“I would eventually marry a human.”

While I was worrying away, Ruijerd said something.

When would eventually be?

“What do you mean by that?”

“Thanks to you, the Supard race is headed towards restoration.

The people of the Biheilil Kingdom and the Ogres have kindly accepted us.

Eventually, like the Ogre race, the countries Royalty and nobility would send someone to create a blood relation with.

And it seems I was deemed to be the most suitable match.”

“Hmm.”

So there was something like that going on...

Well there usually was.

Ruijerd’s position was something like the assistant of the Chieftain.

But as a Hero of the previous war, he was looked up to.

The village idol... may be a little off but he’s something like a guardian deity.

Ruijerd would end up marrying some Biheilil noblewoman.

The Supard race would enter a position of guardians of the Biheilil Kingdom and they would be able to rest easy.

“But if I had the choice... Rudeus, your family would be better.”

With those words, I felt warm from the bottom of my heart.

A good relationship with Biheilil Kingdom would be to their benefit.

I’m sure that it would be much more beneficial as opposed to being in my family.

But Ruijerd chose my family.

I was chosen!

No, not me.

Not good, I almost became Girldeus.

But as I was thinking that, I realised something.

“Is Norn alright with you?”

“What do you mean by that?”

Ruijerd is suspicious.

“Norn is... How do I say it, quite selfish.

And without thinking about the conciseness, say some awful things.

If you for example had some kind of lovers quarrel, she may end up saying something insensitive about your past.”

“ ... ”

Words that I didn't expect came out.

That was odd.

I'm supposed to be supporting Norn, I should be pointing out Norn's good parts.

But all that comes out are the bad points.

“It seems like she can do housework, but it can't be called her speciality.

She can study, but she can't put very much of it to practical use, she fails at most things the first time.

At Sharia she can cope with most things easily, but at the Supard village, there would be plenty of things she wouldn't be able to figure out.

I'm sure she would end up causing trouble for you.”

No, this isn't what I want to say.

In my house there's another young woman.

For example, Aisha.

Honestly, Aisha is far more excellent than Norn.

She can do housework and look after children.

She's better to the extent that there's nothing Norn can do that Aisha can't.

When I think about it like that, I can't help but think “Is Norn alright”.

I want to root for Norn.

But I also like Ruijerd.

It's because I want these two to be happy that I try to think of how to make sure no one is dissatisfied.

“—But that's the result of her trying her very hardest.”

What interrupts my words is Ruijerd.

“I know. Norn's bad points and her good points.”

I lost my words and Ruijerd looked as if he was pressing me for answers.

“You know it too don't you?”

“Of course.”

Norn has plenty of good things about her.

I'm not that well informed on Norn as of late.

But I know what kind of person she has become.

Having lost to Aisha, she became far more docile than necessary.

She became far less hysteric and began to get along with Aisha.

Taking care of someone is good.

It wasn't so much at home, but her classmates and juniors looked up to her.

At her 15th birthday, plenty of Norn's friends came.

Even now, some of her school's underclassmen still come over for help over studying or the student council comes to ask for advice.

Norn goes at everything with the utmost effort.

And as a result of trying her hardest at everything, although she can't be the best, she can at least somehow do the things she isn't good at.

Because Norn has plenty of things she isn't good at, she can't do things in an instant compared to others.

And so compared to Aisha, there's a world of difference.

But other people don't matter.

With her own effort, she steadily advances.

And I'm sure that, from here on out, she'll continue like that.

Norn is just that kind of girl.

A very good girl.

A little sister I can be proud of.

And Ruijerd also knew that.

He knew that Norn is someone that always tried her hardest.

There's no need for me to say it.

And even Norn's bad parts.

He had known for a long time, and accepted it.

Taking it all in and still holding feeling for her.

"...Whenever it may be, will you always protect Norn?"

"Yes."

Ruijerd gave a reassuring nod.

Right, if it's him, he'd protect Norn until he died.

"When you get married, and Norn is surrounded by a different race, separated from her family, and think she's in trouble, will you support her?"

"Yes."

Ruijerd gave a reassuring nod.

Right, if it's him, he'd support Norn until he died.

"If Norn is feeling down and says something bad, will you remind her of her courtesy?"

"Yes."

Ruijerd gave a reassuring nod.

Right, if it's him, he would comfort Norn and gently hold her.

"Norn is a Millis believer... Can you promise not to cheat?"

"Yes."

Ruijerd gave a reassuring nod.

Right, it's obvious. Ruijerd wouldn't lose himself to a woman's wiles.

"Norn is, she's a bigger crybaby than me, is that ok?"

"Yes. So don't you start crying."

I began crying my eyes out.

His words were short but his tone was resolute. His face was serious and his gaze, earnest.

"There's no problem. I understand."

I suddenly remembered.

During the journey across the central continent after the teleport incident.

I remained at ease by Ruijerd's side.

No matter what kind of demonic creature, I could rest, assured that he would protect us.

Of course, he's not that great at taking care of things other things than demons, but as a person, that can't be helped.

Nobody's perfect.

Norn can simply make up for the things Ruijerd can't do.

And I'm sure Norn, as she is now, can do that.

She has already proven that.

If she couldn't then Ruijerd wouldn't have said that he desired her.

While thinking like that, my shoulder grew weak.

I was relieved.

"Please take care of my sister."

Finally, I lowered my head.

Author's Q&A

Q: It's because of practice that she can cook well, but how did Rudi, after living in the same house for so many years, not try it?

A: If he had asked she would have made something for him, but all the practise was probably done somewhere else.

Like at school.

Q: I'm so happy that I feel that something's going to go wrong...

A: Even though this is a redundancy chapter!?

Q: It's good to cry isn't it.

A: I don't mind it.

Q: I think this belongs on the daily rankings. But if the people that see Mushoku Tensei and then go read the original are only a few, I think it would be a waste.

A: The redundancy chapter is just an extra so it's ok.

Q: The light novel manga deal that I bought has arrived.

A: So it arrived!

That's good...

Q: A secret extra chapter... It's really great.

A: That this story became three chapters, it surprised me too...

Chapter 3

Norn's Marriage – Final Part

Part 1

— Norn's Perspective —

It has been decided that I will be marrying Ruijerd-san.

It was quite a sudden experience.

I answered earnestly to my brother's various enquiries, after which he pulled Ruijerd-san along with him in no less than 10 days. Ruijerd-san then confessed his love for me and asked my hand in marriage.

The talk moved forward as my mind was still in a daze, the marriage ceremony was to be carried out after 10 more days.

Brother and Ruijerd-san were steadily making progress.

My job was to create a marriage dress along with the Superd women. A very Superd like dress which looked similar to what Ruijerd-san always wore.

It seemed that the marriage would be carried out in Superd style.

I wished that I would get to do it in Milis style, but stressing the fact that I would be the one going to Ruijerd-san's place as his bride, I wasn't reluctant. All the Superd people were good-natured as well, and I honestly didn't want anything more than this.

Ruijerd-san would probably not like being kissed on his forehead in public.

Brother told me that he would take care of it and I could only be grateful for that.

But, maybe, if I only wished for just the **Milis Necklace** then maybe... Should I ask for it... ?

I'm pretty sure this might be my last chance to request something selfish from my brother.

“ ... ”

I was currently in the middle of clearing out my room as I was pondering about such things. The room that I have been living in almost everyday together with Aisha after being brought along by Ruijerd-san. Since I had been living in the dormitory for so long my attachment with the dorm room was stronger than this one.

But I realized that various memories dwelled within this room as I was clearing things out one-by-one.

The doll of Ruijerd-san created by Zanoba-senpai. I was very moved the first time I saw it and ended up asking for it, after which I placed it in my dorm room. Even Nii-san did not say anything.

Someway or another, gazing at this doll became my daily habit. It wasn't an exact replica of Ruijerd-san but it was still similar to him. I kept wishing that I could see him again, watching this doll everyday.

And then the wooden sword. The sword I received from Eris-neesan which I swung almost everyday because of the training I received from her.

I hadn't really progressed that much, and I knew that I didn't have much talent for it, but it was fine.

Swinging a sword is quite fun and it wasn't like I wished to be the world's strongest. No one in Sharia said something ridiculous like 'You don't have talent so forget about it!'. Of course, that list also included Nii-san and even Eris-neesan, Sylphy-neesan and Roxy-neesan... not even Zanoba-senpai or Cliff-senpai said something like that. Even though each and everyone of them were extremely gifted, they didn't say anything.

I now know how wonderful a thing they did for me and I am grateful for that. And I also understand that even though I did not have any talent, giving your all and working hard is what really mattered. If not for that I would have never become the Student Council President.

In the Student Council where I became the President, none of them had any talent. To some teachers, and even during the first part of the year, we were known as the Stupid Student Council. But only Vice Principal Jinas said ‘The students are getting along well, even better than during Ariel’s Presidency’.

Actually, it seemed that crimes and violence among students were few during my time as President...

It was possible that I just got lucky, but I think that it was *because* we didn’t have any talent.

It was because we were dumb, we could be considerate of the students.

Because we were dumb, the students could be considerate of us. They would think that they had no choice but to help us out.

If in a school of over 10,000 people, if they know that a student council of little more than 10 people are still giving their best, it’s only natural that those 10,000 students would start to be more considerate.

I had also stopped wearing my school uniform, which now stay in the closet.

If I recall, I heard from someone that Nanahoshi-san designed this uniform. Before that, students wore tattered clothing. But everybody was already wearing the uniforms or robes by the time I enrolled.

Everyone wore the same uniform, be it a student with a scary face or a bewitching woman. I thought it was because everyone wore the same uniforms that I had so many friends. Were it not for the uniforms, I wouldn’t have been able to make so many friends.

Just by looking at the Demon race or a Beast race, I couldn’t even approach them as I would be too scared by their appearance.

Well something like that is beyond me, really.

But even Aisha mimicked us by adopting the uniform system in her Mercenary group, which led me to believe that putting on the same uniform on every student was a very effective move.

‘Cause even that Aisha ended up doing it.

And finally, father’s sword that was now hanging on the wall. The sword he used almost all the time before marrying mother. The sword given to me by Nii-san when he was

distributing father's belongings. There was one more sword given to Aisha, but he quickly took it away saying that he had to use it in the war. Father's armor laid in mother's room.

I used to pray to this sword each time something happened.

Father wasn't really a Milis believer and was someone who would scowl at the very mention of it, but I liked doing it anyway.

If he were still alive, he would surely scold me for this but I didn't think that he would hate it. Since even father tried his best at things. Because there are times when we fail even if we work hard which is true for me and even Nii-san... that's why I liked doing it.

And thus today as well, I prayed to my father.

"I am going to get married now, father."

No, it was more like a report than a prayer I guess.

Nii-san said this. It seemed that even he visited father's grave to report things. Even though he's such a busy person... He's very diligent.

"Nii-san has been diligently playing your role, father. Even though I think that I am a burden to him, he's still doing his best for my sake without raising any complaints whatsoever.

... I can't thank him enough for what he's done for me."

I intended to report about my marriage but ended up giving my thanks to Nii-san. I thought of Nii-san as someone who protected me by filling in for father who died and mother who became that way. Of course, he's a very busy person so he couldn't keep his eye on me all the time which made me thought he looked after me unwillingly after father's death.

I now know that it wasn't like that.

I can't explain it more properly but Nii-san seriously tried his best to fill in for both father and mother.

I had a memory, a very old and distant one. It was a memory of right after I had been born. Of course it was vague and I didn't have a good grip on it. It was a time when I couldn't even reply in short words properly. It was a memory where... I had a contest with Aisha.

I didn't know why we were having a contest but I remember that mother was there at the goal line. And of course I was defeated by Aisha. Aisha reached mother with a terrific speed and then mother hugged Aisha and praised her.

I cried after watching that. Mother was far from me and I thought that she was stolen away by Aisha, that I wouldn't be receiving any praise and so I cried. And then mother said "Norn, I'm waiting right here for you, so come to me." She said that and waited for me until I finally managed to reach her and then she praised me.

Nii-san was also someone who waited for me. No matter how slow I was he still waited for me. He persevered, even at times when he was confused or smiled wryly, he never once abandoned me and always waited for me.

He's that kind of person. That's why I think that he seriously tried to fill in mother's shoes as well.

"..."

It's the same with the marriage preparations as well. Nii-san did all of it. I did think that if father was still alive then he would have done the same things as Nii-san.

He might've not liked Ruijerd-san though and would've gotten into a quarrel with him but if it came to marriage then he would've said "Leave it to me" and would've done the preparations in secret.

Since it seemed like the same thing happened during mother's marriage.

"..."

While thinking about such things I continued clearing out my room and in no time, I was finished. It was never a room that had much in it, but now that my personal belongings were no longer here it was completely empty. It seemed like this room would be used by Lucy-chan and other kids but it should be fine if it's cleared out this much.

Now all I had to do was to take my belongings and some keepsakes and go to Ruijerd-san's house. To Ruijerd-san's house in the Superd village.

Honestly, it felt like I was in a dream or something. Marrying that Ruijerd-san that I admired for so long since way back then. My heart was beating like crazy. It seemed it was the same for Sylphy-neesan, starting a married life with the person you love gives birth to expectations mixed with tension.

Ruijerd-san was way older than me but after I married him then I would have to do what Nii-san and Sylphy-neesan and the others do. I knew how it's done but I didn't really put into practise. I'm a little nervous. I wonder if he'll be gentle. I wonder if I'll be able to do it properly.

But my mind tilted more towards the expectations rather than tension. I was really nervous. That day, the moment I heard Ruijerd-san's name I immediately asked Nii-san to go ahead with the marriage proposal, I was really glad about that. I thought that from the bottom of my heart.

"Hey, Norn-ane... do you have a moment?"

Suddenly, I heard the knocking on the door. There was only one person who would call me Norn-ane.

It was Aisha.

"Yeah, what's the matter?"

"Umm... can I talk to you for a bit?"

Aisha entered the room with a somewhat fidgety look and closed the door behind her. That was unusual. It's possible that this might be the first time I saw Aisha acting like this towards me.

"How about we sit down there?"

"Okay."

With a suggestive tone she sat on the bed. I put my luggage away which held my belongings which I was going to take to Ruijerd-san's place, and sat on a chair.

"Uhh... Norn-ane, congratulations on your marriage... no, engagement?"

“Thank you.”

Now that I recalled, when Nii-san announced my marriage, I was then congratulated by various people but never by Aisha.

“It’s a somewhat strange feeling. That Norn-ane is getting married.”

“Did you come here to say only that?”

“No, not that... umm... Norn-ane, how does it feel to get married?”

Aisha wasn’t facing my way. She was averting her eyes away as if trying to ask something that shouldn’t be asked.

“How... meaning?”

“Why are you getting married, Norn-ane?”

... Ah, now I remember. Aisha had said something like that to me before. That “Even though you know you don’t have any talent, why would you still try?”

She was the same as usual little sister.

Still, those things sounded like sarcasm or insults back in the day but I’ve come to realise that those were quite the different things. Because Aisha is Aisha, she has so much talent in so many things, she ends up getting puzzled in various ways. Because she ends up doing everything easily, she can’t understand someone who tries to do something which they cannot do.

No... words spoken by Aisha back in the day were mixed with a considerable amount of sarcasm. That’s why I really disliked her in those days.

But that dislike had already gotten away.

I wonder just when the sarcasm got out of Aisha... I am not sure right now but I do think that she changed a lot after Lucy-chan was born.

“Even if you ask me why... well for once this marriage has meaning to it, and I love Ruijerd-san as well.”

“What’s it like to love someone?”

“... A desire to live together or the desire to hug your lover or be hugged back, those kind of feelings gush up naturally.”

“I love my Onii-chan but is that the wrong kind of love?”

“That’s... I don’t know because I’m not you.”

“Right...”

After that Aisha stretched her legs out while sitting on the bed and fell on it with a thud.

“I really don’t get it...”

While flapping her legs around, Aisha groaned in puzzlement.

“These days, both Pursena and Rinia talk about nothing but marriage, it’s so annoying. They keep talking about how I’ll miss my chance or how I can’t compromise after having come this far. Is marriage such a desperate thing to do? Do I have to do it? Is there really a need to do it theoretically? But it isn’t like everyone is thinking that far right?”

“Do you not want to marry, Aisha?”

“I don’t know know whether I want to or not.”

“Don’t you have any one you like?”

“Nope.

I decided on marrying Onii-chan when I was a child but even he seems to think differently of that idea, but then I can’t even imagine leaving this house...”

Aisha was all over Nii-san ever since she was a small child. She was like that since I met her for the first time in Millis, around the time when father recovered and began to work splendidly for a short while.

Honestly, no one really knew that Aisha was my sister. It was like if you asked someone from the hostel, they would go “Ah, so she’s from a previous marriage”. Even Lilya-san said to see her as a fellow maid rather than my sister.

I wonder just when I actually started to accept her as my own sister. Probably around the time when we started going to Milis school together or possibly when we travelled to Sharia with Ruijerd-san and Ginger-san.

I couldn't recall it now but I did know that I had already acknowledged her as my sister when we started our new lifestyle in Sharia.

"Norn-ane, just how are you feeling right now?"

"I... feel blessed."

"Blessed? What kind of feeling is that?"

"It's hard to explain but, how do I put it, I feel like nothing could go wrong... I understand that it's not going to be nothing but good times from here on out, but I feel like from here on out, I don't have to doubt the good things anymore, something like that I guess."

By the time I finished talking, Aisha had already sat up and was staring at me. And after a short pause, she said :

"That's what you call being blessed?"

"Seems to me that sort of thing..."

"But I feel like that almost all the time?"

"Then, aren't you always being blessed?"

As I said that, Aisha fell on the bed once again.

"Being blessed... I don't think so. I'm kinda envious. I feel like I've lost to you for the first time."

"I don't really feel like I've won though..."

"Nah, I lost. I probably lost to you, Norn-ane."

That was unexpected.

Never in my entire life, no matter what I did, was there a test where I won over Aisha.

And it wasn't just Aisha.

Even in school I wasn't someone special. I only had a 45% winning chance in a mock magic battle and averaged out at 80 marks in all of my tests. Of course, being the top student was only a trifling matter.

If I studied and had a contest with Aisha who didn't study then I would definitely win once or twice but as the matches continued 10 or 20 times I would start to lose all of them. Aisha

had a knack for knowing things, her growth was fast and she was good at gripping the essence.

That Aisha felt at loss...

Despite that I didn't feel all that happy. It's probably because I never really gave it my all because I never intended to compete with her. And it's definitely not like I'm marrying so that I can have an upper hand on Aisha.

"Listen, Norn-ane."

"What is it?"

"Can I come visit you once in a while after you get married?"

This was unexpected as well. It was probably because I had the impression that Aisha was keeping her distance from me for quite a while. She didn't show this kind of attitude when caring for Nii-san's kids but even while I was alone or had nothing to do she wouldn't approach me that much.

"Yeah... of course."

"When you have kids, let me hold them okay?"

"Okay."

Kids...

I've heard various things from Sylphy-neesan. Though I think that it's still too early for me, I've still resolved myself for when the time comes.

Well, I've resolved myself for whatever that comes before it anyway.

Aisha was taking care of Nii-san's kids even now. Even Sylphy-ane thanks her a lot for helping out. Now that I think about it if I left the house then I would have to raise them alone. I'm worried about that.

I wonder if I'd be able to do the job...

Sylphy-neesan would probably say "You'll be just fine, Norn-chan", Roxy-neesan would probably be as uneasy as me and Eris-neesan would just say "Raise them however you want".

I'm worried.

“If you would be so kind to teach me about child rearing, I’ll be glad.”

“Leave that to me!”

“Okay... fufufu.”

I laughed. Aisha’s smile made me somewhat happy and thus I laughed.

That day I chatted with Aisha till late night. Chats that didn’t hold any meaning or just idle complaints with no conclusion carried on endlessly.

And then, the next day, I took my belongings and moved to Ruijerd-san’s house.

Part 2

— Rudeus' Perspective —

Norn's and Ruijerd's marriage was to be performed in the Superd village in Superd style. The villagers gathered with each of their own cooking under the full moon and congratulated the bride and groom while having a feast together.

I wasn't one of the villagers but I still participated by bringing along my cooking and my family as if it was natural. Since we were Norn's family, they obviously couldn't say no. No one denied us. Rather, they all welcomed us.

The cooking was prepared by Lilya and Aisha.

It seemed that Aisha held some complex feelings regarding Norn's marriage. Ever since the marriage had been decided, she was seen quite often lying on the sofa rolling around, deep in thought and then getting scolded by Lilya. Which reminded me that a few days before the marriage, the two of them were talking about something till late night in Norn's room. I didn't know what they were talking about... but even she might have some things to think upon.

Since it definitely wasn't like she wouldn't give her blessings to Norn.

Even the cooking that was brought for the wedding saw no signs of shoddiness, instead she put all of her skills into making it. She collected the ingredients from Milis and Asura and made a huge fruitcake.

We were worried whether or not the Superds would be delighted by something sweet but then Roxy gave it her seal of approval. Well, it's possible that she just likes sweet things...

Since it was pretty much Norn's most precious moment, all of the family members attended. The small kids Ars and Sieg were here as well, and of course Leo, Jiro and Beat too. Not just the family, the perpetrator who made this marriage a reality, Orsted, too was here stealthily hidden into a corner.

Added to that, we invited Norn's friends from Sharia as well, who were happy to attend. The Student Council and Norn's underclassmen, after hearing about Norn's marriage, requested with their heads bowed that they be allowed to attend as well.

In the open place of the Superd village, the humans who were attending the marriage while shivering in fear was a pitiable sight to see the least but...

Well, after seeing the happy and blessed Norn their tension gradually wore off and they had enough composure to pour sake to Norn when the banquet was reaching its climax.

Yep, Norn looked happy.

At home, or rather in front of me, Norn looked sullen almost all the time but now that she was sitting beside Ruijerd, her face was floating with a bashful smile the whole time.

Moreover, each time Norn tried to look at Ruijerd and Ruijerd who sensed it tried to look back, she quickly looked downwards as her face got red like a tomato.

Her body was dressed in the traditional bridal costume made by the Superd females, in front of plenty of cookery, her face grew red and a smile floated each time she saw Ruijerd.

Also, it was good that we prepared a Milis style wedding to include in the middle of the actual ceremony as a surprise. We pretended that a change of clothing was necessary and dressed up Ruijerd and Norn in snow white clothing. By the time they returned, Cliff who had hidden himself as a surprise guest, started reading the Milis ritual prayer.

In the end, when the necklace prepared beforehand was put on Norn by Ruijerd, Norn's face went full red as Ruijerd went down on his knees only for Norn to kiss his forehead clumsily.

Norn had a surprised face the whole time but by the time it ended she was smiling in tears. That smile seemed to be incredibly happy.

If this is not a blessing then I don't know what is.

"Norn-ane looks so beautiful."

Aisha called that Norn beautiful. Was it her attire that she considered beautiful or was it her happiness, I did not know, but Aisha was looking enviously at Norn.

“Your time will come too, Aisha.”

“I won’t be doing this.”

An immediate reply. Aisha did not wish to be married. For me, I would like to send Aisha away in the same fashion as Norn but...

Well, marriage isn’t life so I wouldn’t mind even if she didn’t want to.

“ ...”

Nevertheless Norn was a bride now huh. I’m deeply moved.

When we met in Milis she was so small and aggressive. After enrolling in school, she even confined herself in her dorm room. A troublesome child, a hopelessly clumsy child, I had such impression of her and yet before I knew she entered the Student Council, became a fine President and worked diligently, was idolized by many of her underclassmen and was now married.

“...Kiiin.”

Reflexively, the inside of my nose became prickly and made a sharp noise.¹

Dear Paul-sama.

Norn is incredibly beautiful, she has been raised into a good girl.

Can you break out from your gravestone?

No, there’s no way you’d be able to.

If not then please come as quickly as possible.

“Onii-chan, don’t cry at a time like this.”

“I’m not crying. *sobs*”

“Right... if you can watch her from afar then why not at least say a few words to her?”

“Nh, nh~”

The banquet was in full swing so the attendees were giving their blessings to the bride and groom in order. Though there wasn’t this kind of custom in Superd style... Cliff might’ve said something.

Norn was receiving their blessings with a smile. She was having such a happy time. Would it be fine if I approached her in such a time like this? I felt like it would be fine just watching her from afar.

“Would Norn be displeased about it?”

“She won’t.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“... Won’t you come with me?”

“Why not go along with everyone?”

Well, it’s not like I’m worried about that. I’m worried how I’m going to react. I’d absolutely end up crying. I would end up crying in Norn’s precious moment. I’d end up making crying sounds ungracefully. Everyone would point at Norn’s big brother as the one who cried at her wedding, a crybaby.

No, that’s fine but just the other day I was being told by Ruijerd not to cry so I didn’t want to cry here of all places. I wanted to at least cry in Sylphy’s lap when I reached home.

“Got it. Then let’s go.”

But I must go. With everyone in tow, I approached Norn.

“Ah.”

When Norn saw us approaching she tightly closed her lips for an instant but immediately turned it to a smile, she might have something to say.

I wonder what, I’m scared. As I was thinking, Sylphy overtook me as I got cold feet and was the first to stand in front of Norn.

“Norn-chan, congratulations on your marriage.”

“Thank you very much. Sylphy-neesan.”

“There will be times when uneasiness or tension happens between the two of you but most of it will be manageable so talk it through with Ruijerd-san properly and give it your best.”

“Yes. I’ll try my best.”

Sylphy said that and gave a smile in return, then stepped aside. The next to come was Eris.

“Norn, congratulations.”

“Yes, thank you very much. Eris-neesan.”

“Don’t forget to do your daily sword practice okay? Ruijerd is strong but it’ll come handy when you have to guard yourself.”

“Yes, I’ll make sure to carve it in my heart.”

Eris nodded in satisfaction and then stepped aside. And then moved to Ruijerd’s side and started talking about something. “I won’t forgive you if you can’t protect Norn.” or so she’s saying. After Eris, Roxy came out in front.

“Norn-san, my deepest and most sincere congratulations.”

“Thank you very much, Roxy-sensei.”

“Stop calling me sensei now... no, make it the last time so allow me the privilege of imparting you with some knowledge. People would say this and that about marriage between different races but there’s no need to give it any heed. If you act ordinarily everyday then people would come to admit it before long.”

“... yes, sensei!”

After that Lilya and Zenith were now in front.

“Miss Norn, my most sincere congratulations.”

“Lilya-san, mother... thank you very much.”

“I think that I wasn’t a pleasant existence for you, Miss Norn. Aisha made you sad on numerous occasion but all the responsibility lies with me and I am to be blamed for...”

“No, there’s nothing like that. Lilya-san, you were my mother as well. Aisha too, is my sister. There were certainly some bad things but I never really thought of it as your fault but rather something that was ordinary.”

“...If you say something like that then, gusu... uuu...”

Lilya was keeping quiet but ended up crying anyway. Really, Lilya just keeps on crying these days. Zenith was gently brushing her back, but after a short while Zenith casually moved to Norn's side.

“Mother?”

“...”

Zenith smiled ever so slightly and took Norn's hand. With both hands, as if to cover up something precious, she tenderly clutched them.

“M-mo-mother...”

Zenith did not say anything. But it was transmitted. The feelings were transmitted to Norn and tears started spilling out in volume from both of Norn's eyes. I quickly understood that she was trying her best to not cry before.

“Mother, th-thank you... very much... uuu... for everything you've... done until now.”

No longer could Norn make out proper sentences. By the time it was my turn Norn's face was already all sloppy because of tears and dripping nose.

Even though it was her precious moment, her marriage...

“Nii-san.”

I took out a handkerchief from my pocket at once and held it against Norn's nose.

“Alright, go ahead and blow now.”

“I can do it myself!”

Norn snatched the handkerchief from me and blowed her nose in it. After that, confused about what to do with the now dirty handkerchief, I took it from her and put it in my pocket. And then once again I faced her.

“Uhh... Norn... congratulations.”

“Nii-san...”

With her lips tightly sealed she looked up at me.

I wonder what should I say. I had prepared to say something but I’ve completely forgotten all of it now.

“Nii-san, umm. Thank you very much for up till now. I’m now happy. But I think that it was all because of you that I’m this happy right now.”

Norn said as I was hesitating.

She said that she was now happy. I could tell it from seeing.

“No... it’s because you worked hard, Norn.”

“I didn’t work hard. Even this marriage, you did all the work for it.”

“If you hadn’t work hard then you wouldn’t have said that you wanted to marry Ruijerd.”

Ruijerd is a soldier person or a child person.

If Norn had stayed the same child she used to be, then this would have ended in complete failure.

“But I think that it’s because of you, Nii-san. Thank you very much from the bottom of my heart.”

When Norn started to sob again, I took out the handkerchief from my pocket, but when I realised that handkerchief was all wet I was quickly presented with a different handkerchief from my side. It was Aisha.

I took that handkerchief and wiped Norn’s tears.

“Norn.”

“Yes.”

“Umm, I can’t say it properly and most of the important things have already been said by others so I don’t have anything else left to say to you but...”

“Yes.”

“There will be hard times or painful times in the future but... keep working hard and umm, stay happy forever.”

Strangely enough, tears did not flow. I thought that I would definitely cry and I was moved to tears not too long ago but by the time I finished talking my tears had already withdrawn. I stood in front of Norn with only a proud feeling.

“...Yes!”

And then, Norn stopped crying as well, with a huge smile on her face she nodded in agreement.

Part 3

And thus, Norn was now married.

Ruijerd and Norn were a couple with a huge difference in their height and age but their compatibility was perfect, as such a child was born in just a year.

A child with a face exactly like Norn's, green hair and a cute tail, having a gem on her forehead, a female Superd.

That girl was named 『Luicelia Superdia』 .

When Orsted heard that name, he made an absurdly scary face. With an absurdly scary face, he smiled.

Looking at that smile, which gave me goosebumps, I realized. I realized that it was the name that was in agreement with his memories.

Author's Q&A

Q. This is redundant!?

Wouldn't it be alright to include it in the main volume?

A. I had originally planned for Gisu to be gathering companions during the Cliff Chapter, and to write the Redundancy Chapter during the Organization Chapter, and then for Gisu to betray them at the end of the Redundancy chapter...

It was that kind of flow that I had planned.

But time flowed a bit faster than I had hoped and Gisu betrayed them at the end of the Cliff Chapter and we ended up with what we have now.

Q. Is the Redundancy chapter in chronological order.

A. It's currently undecided.

It's possible that the order may be mixed up.

Q. One question: How did they bring Beet along?

I'm pretty sure he was planted outside the door...

A. Of course he was transferred into a plant pot.

[Lucy and Papa]

Chapter 4

Lucy's First Day at School – First Part

Part 1

Some time passed.

Eris and Roxy safely gave birth to their children. Both of them were girls. Roxy's daughter was named Lily and Eris's daughter was named Christina. With this, we now had 4 daughters and 2 sons.

Our house had become a little cramped. It was about time we gave some thought to remodelling while taking family planning into consideration.

Furthermore, Lucy was now 7 years old.

Now that she was 7, she could be called a first-year student studying in a primary school. The primary school was a place where kids of the same age learned about the fundamental knowledge that was essential for survival while co-habiting with other students. Of course, it would be beneficial if that knowledge was taught by the parents themselves.

The most important keyword in a school was communal life.

Humans are beings who lived in groups. Most humans can't live alone. They are beings who live together while helping each other, loving each other and getting into fights from time to time. It's possible that those with the will to stay alone are out there, but they are probably a minority.

A school is a place where one learns how to make colleagues or friends, how to interact with them and how fights occur.

Nevertheless, a primary-school-like system didn't exist in this Ranoa Kingdom. It should be obvious because there was no compulsory education. Here, a school was considered to be a place where people go if they wanted to go.

Even so, I thought that there was a need to go to school. Part of the reason was that I dropped out of high school in my previous life, but as for this life, I did learn a lot of things in the school of this world too.

I got along with Zanoba, met with Cliff, Badigadi, Nanahoshi, Ariel... And then married Sylphy.

There was no doubt that it was because of my daily attendance to Ranoa Magic University that my human relations were now in such abundance.

As such, I thought that there was a need to go to school, to let them go.

As such, during last year's family council, that proposal was approved by more than half the members. Sylphy, Roxy and Lilya were in agreement. Even though Eris said "There's not really any need to go", she didn't strongly oppose it.

Thus, it was decided that our children would start attending the University when they became 7. Though the other students enrolling wouldn't necessarily be in the same age group, it was decided with the thought that it would be beneficial to their future.

And today was Lucy's first day attending school. From here on out, for 7 years, or possibly even more if she repeated a year or two, this was the very first day of her school which she would be attending for a very long time.

"Is there anything that you've forgotten, Lucy?"

"Nope!"

Lucy, wearing her oversized uniform and carrying a bag too big for her, was now standing in front of the entranceway. Everything that she had on was brand new. The beginner's staff and the robe contained within the bag, magic textbooks, even the lunch box, everything was new. And it seemed that Lucy, with all her new things, was happily grinning while looking at herself in the mirror.

As a result of that, she was somewhat careless, even to my words. Well, she did check those out many times over yesterday night, and there weren't that many belongings to begin with. So I guess it should be fine.

But, that, isn't she forgetting that? Then shouldn't it be fine to remind her?

"Do you have your handkerchief?"

"It's in my pocket!"

"Pencil case?"

"It's in my bag!"

"Lunch box?"

"It's in my bag!"

"My goodbye kiss?"

"That's a no!"

That's a no!?

Impossible, that can't be...

Nevermind.

Um... was there something else? Something which was easily forgotten. Like future dreams, aspirations, the truth...

"Rudy, it's gonna be fine."

As I pondered, Sylphy came and patted on my back.

"Lucy is already a grown up, so it's fine."

Grown up.

She had certainly grown up. She was already 7 years old. Now that she was 7 she could do various things and do it alone.

"Papa, it's gonna be fine! I'm gonna work hard!"

Lucy said while clenching her fist. That gesture was brave, lovely and very worrying. If I was a kidnapper and looked at something like this, I would immediately steal her away. Although she had grown up, she still had some way to go.

“Lucy, don’t follow any strangers no matter what they say, okay?”

“Okay!”

“If they forcefully try to take you away then shout out my name as loud as you can, okay?”

“Okay!”

“If they covered up your mouth and said that they’ll kill you if you make a noise then ask them to read the letter I’ve prepared, okay?”

“Okaaaay!”

Incidentally, I’ve written quite a bit for the kidnapper. I’ve written just whose subordinate I am and what kind of people I have connections with. I’ve also written just what would happen if Lucy were to be hurt. It’s possible that they might not be literate, but I’ve made necessary arrangements with the slave traders and asked them to socially lynch those who seem like they would kidnap my children. Those who would kidnap my children would be ostracised.

Still, cause for concern was something that was common. Unpredictable situations could exist in any amount. I couldn’t help but get worried sick that Lucy might get dragged into something like that.

“Lucy, if your friends at school bully you then tell it to your teacher.”

“Okay.”

“I don’t think it’ll happen, but if even the teacher bullies you, then tell it to Blue-Mama or Vice principal. Both of them stay in the staff room.”

“Okay.”

“If you think that you can’t tell to Blue-Mama or Vice principal then there’s White-Mama or Red-Mama or Auntie Aisha or Granny Lilya or Granny Elinalize... anyway, just consult someone. Of course, Papa is fine as well and Papa’s friends too. Don’t try to do things alone, okay?”

“Okaaaay.”

“If you are being bullied by some other kid then...”

I was suddenly grabbed at the nape of my neck and was pulled backwards. When I examined the situation, I saw Sylphy with an anger on her face. Lucy seemed to have become a little downhearted as well.

“Papa, I’ll be fine, okay...?”

Lucy said with a little uneasiness in her voice, her eyes upturned.

I wonder if I ended up making her nervous. I should’ve told her more about a dream-like school life. For example, to try her best to make 100 friends in school.

But it’s a serious matter. Though at times it would seem like there would be no one to help you from bullying, your ally would be lying in wait, somewhere around you.

“Rudy, try to believe in Lucy a little bit more.”

“.....Okay.”

But yeah, that’s right.

We’re sending the kid to school to raise her level of independence. I shouldn’t be thinking about dealing with every single little thing. In time, even Lucy would grow up and then leave our house to become fully independent. Of course, I’m talking about way into the future, but we were sending her to school so that she could do that properly in the first place.

That’s right, this matter was decided by the whole family.

“Lucy, say that you’re off.”

“I’m off!”

Lucy said that and opened the door, she left the house cheerfully. Seeing that, I said “Take care” while carefully watching over her.

“...”

The ones who saw her off were me and Sylphy, Eris with Leo, Zenith and Lilya. Roxy had already left for school. It seemed that some trouble came up at the Mercenary group, and

as such, Aisha left just as early. The rest of the kids were still sleeping as they were still small.

“I’m going for my sword practise.”

“Well then, allow me to do the laundry.”

“Then, I’ll do the cleaning.”

While everyone left in small groups, I just kept staring at the door. The same as Leo. I’m sure our hearts are on the same wavelength.

I’m worried.

Perhaps Lucy had already gotten lost on her way. Though she walked the road to school along with Sylphy and Roxy quite often. But she’s alone today. I was worried.

As I thought, perhaps I shouldn’t let a 7 year old child walk alone. Such a cute little child should not be allowed to walk the roads alone. I should make a muscular bodyguard follow her. For example, someone with green hair, holding a white spear, who loves children.

After that, comes teaching.

Lucy had been given special lessons by Eris, Roxy and Sylphy. It’s not that she won’t be able to keep up, but that we might have taught her so much that it would cause her to feel out of place.

It’s not like she’s a raw diamond either. Though Vice Principal Jinas did say something like that, we still enrolled her as a normal student keeping in mind that a normal experience would be best for her. She even sat a proper examination.

I did not know whether that would result into a good direction or a bad direction. I also had fears that she might be used as a guinea pig.

“Leo.”

“Woof.”

Leo replied to me with but a single word, and raised his head to stop me in my tracks. As expected of our guardian deity. We both were dancing to the same rhythm. We didn't even need to exchange any words between us.

“Rudy! Don't you dare!”

As I put my hand on the door, I heard Sylphy's sharp voice coming from the back. On looking back, I saw an irritated Sylphy standing there with her hands on her waist.

“Didn't you promise just yesterday that you wouldn't do anything and just watch over!?”

“No, you're misunderstanding. Leo wants to go for walk.”

As I said that, Leo turned on his tail, walked towards the hallway, and escaped to the children's room.

This was treachery. He would protect the kids from outer enemies but wouldn't protect me from my wife.

“Listen, Rudy.”

As I was petrified on the spot, Sylphy gave out a sigh without removing her hands from her waist.

“I've told you before, but I think that I was able to grow up because I was separated from you, Rudy. You taught me magic, you taught me how to study, and making that as my basis, I learned a lot. Even after you were gone, even when I went to Ariel-sama after the Teleport Incident.”

“Yeah.”

“It's true, teaching someone all kinds of things and protecting them is good. But only having things given to you by someone else is not. People have to find themselves and know what they can and can't do. If someone is always supporting you, when the time comes to walk on your own, you won't be able to.”

I was looking forward to this day. As Lucy's guardian, I would go to school together with her, ask the teacher to take care of my kid, and intended to show her around the school. For that reason alone, I took a holiday today. I requested Orsted to give me a day off.

But, Sylphy insisted yesterday just like right now. That I mustn't be allowed to go along with her. That Lucy should be sent to school alone. She insisted upon that.

"That's why, okay? Just quietly keep on the look out for now? Even if she made a mistake it'll only be for Lucy's own sake."

".....Okay."

I consented as well.

Sylphy had been raising Lucy for 7 years. She of all people sent Lucy out with such confidence, that's why I must respect that too. It's bad if I just keep on dealing with things for her.

Well, it's so worrying because I understand that. Lucy was a reliable kid. She was good at taking care of her little brothers and sisters, she was obedient, and I had heard that the neighboring kids yearned for her as well. In fact, she might just get used to school life even faster than someone like me.

Then there was only one thing that I could do. I prayed so that Lucy had a fun time in school. My God resided in that school so my prayer should definitely get through.

"...Then, I'll be going to meet Orsted-sama."

"Yeah. Got it. If there's something you need then tell me."

...But I still feel lonely. While thinking that I headed towards Orsted's office.

Part 2

All of that happened about 1 hour ago.

“And now I’m here.”

“...”

“I mean, I know that Sylphy is right. Even I— even Sylphy was able to grow because we left our house. That’s unmistakably right.”

I was expressing my idle complaints. I had consented. If that’s what Sylphy had decided then I had to abide by that too. Luckily, there were many acquaintances in the Magic University and danger was low as well. I had also heard that student order had improved quite a bit because of Norn’s Presidency. The mercenary group led by Aisha had become quite big due to which the whole town’s order had improved as well.

Yet, I was still worried. I had this indescribable fuzzy feeling.

“But... you know.

Lucy is still 7 years old. She’s so small yet has to go to school alone... that’s just...

Well, I mean it’s true that I went to Eris’s place when I was 7 and started exploring around my village from age 5 but... But I could at least see her off, right?

Orsted-sama, what do you think?”

“...”

Orsted had a grim face. A face which questioned whether this matter was related to work or not.

I might’ve mistaken him as someone to consult with. When given considerable thought I realised that he was still my boss. Not a person who should be listening to my idle complaints.

If the idle talk was related to Hitogami then it might be fine but I guess lodging complaints about my family matters was not a good idea.

Even Orsted might not know how to answer if he was suddenly asked about something like this. And Lucy was someone who was not within Orsted's field of knowledge...

I just thought that Orsted might understand somehow.

This unbearable feeling of mine!

“...”

As I was lost in thought, Orsted stood up. He could also be seen perking up his shoulders. Of course, I'd expect this as I've associated myself with Orsted for a long time. I knew that he wouldn't get angry at something like this.

He was not angry at all. It took a considerable amount of effort to anger him.

“You are foolish.”

Huh? He got angry?

He's not angry, right? He looks angry. That's weird. I'm being scolded.

“...Use this.”

The thing Orsted handed over to me was the black helmet. The spare curse reduction helmet.

“...”

What am I supposed to with this?

“You're not worried about your daughter, you just want to go and see her, don't you?”

“!”

I see, that's right!

I just want to go and see her. It's not that I'm worried about Lucy or not or anything. No, obviously, that's one reason as well, but I just want to see her introducing herself in the

classroom, quickly raising her hand trying to answer a question, tip-toeing in the library to get a book, and things like that.

There was no parent's day in Magic University. I wanted to go and see Norn as well but couldn't. I wanted to watch Lucy at least.

That wish of mine was very big!

“B-but, if I go and see her then Sylphy would get angry.”

“...”

When I said that, Orsted silently took off his coat. And then, put it on my shoulder. As if to say “Use this too”. Just what am I supposed to do with the helmet and this coat?

“Umm... this is?”

“It's fine as long as you don't go.”

Orsted-sama, I do not know what you are trying to say.

Please explain it in a way that the foolish me can understand. Even though I want to go, I shouldn't? Please spare me that quick wit of yours.

“.....Hm?”

No wait, does that mean...

Rudeus himself mustn't cross that bridge which means that it's fine if he doesn't.

One's clothing determines one's position. So if the clothing changes so does the position. And if the position changes then the person changes too.

I had the position of Orsted's right hand man while I wore the grey robe. But what would happen when I wore the white coat and black helmet?

“...”

I put on the helmet and wore the coat. The helmet was heavy and the coat was bulky but warm. If I wore it for a long duration of time, my shoulders would probably get stiff. But that was only a trivial matter. I stood in front of the mirror.

“This is... me...”¹

The one being reflected in the mirror was undoubtedly... The Dragon God Orsted! That's right, if I wore the black helmet and white coat then even I could become Dragon God Orsted! If I were to go and was scolded then it's fine if Orsted goes!

Everything turned out better than expected!

“...”

...No, it's different no matter how you look at it.

I did not look like Orsted at all. My height was different and so was my breadth. My entire ambience was completely wrong to begin with. There's wasn't any strange and powerful atmosphere like the one that comes from Orsted. The being reflected in the mirror looked like a impersonator no matter how you looked at it. To the trained eye, this appearance would be found out as a sham at just one look.

“Umm... won't they find out like this?”

“They wouldn't be able to know that it's you.”

Well that's true. Yeah, that's just how it was. It didn't have to be Orsted, it didn't even have to be me. Which meant that I should just put on the helmet and be done with it. As expected of Orsted, he's an amazingly bright gentleman.

“Orsted-sama.”

“...”

“Thank you very much.”

“Hmm.”

Orsted reseated himself in the chair with a tired expression. There's probably some documents that need filling out. I might've interrupted him during his work. Since I wasn't supposed to be here today.

“Well then, I'm off.”

I went out of the conference room with an appearance similar to Orsted's. As I couldn't bear it any longer, I hurried to Magic University.

Part 3

I left the office in Dragon God style.

It was a mighty fine weather outside. Fine weather appropriate for Lucy's first day at school. And I somehow felt stronger, probably because I was wearing these clothes.

Is this how a person feels who swaggers about under borrowed authority? I feel like I could make even the North God dance around my pinky.

“Orsted-sama, are you about to leave?”

“...!”

As I was thinking that, I was suddenly called out from the back of the office. When I looked around, I could see a young boy holding a large sword.

Aleksander Ryback. It was North God Kalman the Third.

Don't tell me, did he hear my thoughts? Nah, that's not it.

I feel like he's cleaned himself up a bit, but it's kind of like, only at the level of feeling stronger after watching Rocky.

That so-called 'movie motivation.'

“Where might you be heading today, Orsted-sama? Shall I accompany you?”

“...?”

For a moment I thought he was mocking me.

However, Alek's eyes were clear in all respects and his tone was sincere.

“Ah, thank you very much for the other day. To think that the North God Style four foot form would have such an advantage...

I never thought that you would be so knowledgeable about the North God style. It's clear to me just how inexperienced I currently am. Now that I recall myself during the Battle of Biheiril, I might die from embarrassment.”

Don't tell me he hasn't yet realised that I'm not Orsted? No, that can't be.

Alek had been at Orsted's side constantly these days. He even lived in one of the basement rooms of the office. He had taken the role like that of a watchdog of Orsted. It would be troublesome if the watchdog mistook his master for someone else.

"Have you not realised yet?"

"What have I not realised!?"

No, when it came to the North God style, he might be deceiving me. It's the Death God's bewitching sword, the technique to make your opponent bewildered.

"Please say honestly, you already know, right?"

When I said that, Alek wore a puzzled face immediately after which it became a serious one, and then he put his hand on his chin. Furthermore, he tilted his head sideways and furrowed his brows. It was as if a question mark was floating around his head. This was truly a face of a person who hadn't yet realised it. It would be quite a feat if this was an acting.

"Please forgive my insolence. It seems I'm a bit dull as such I cannot understand."

"...Really? Can't you feel that something might be out of place?"

"Might it be the trivialities? Please forgive me but I'm someone who doesn't pay much attention to minor details as such I might not be able to evade any traps or such and I'm aware that is not a good thing, but I've been like this since birth so..."

He began giving an explanation. Did he really not realise? My height was different, even my physique, and I wasn't really trying to imitate Orsted's voice or anything, my tone was different from his to begin with. Even though the curse had been reduced, you could still feel discomfort to some degree...

Is this a joke? Eh? Really?

"The correct answer lies in the conference room of the office."

"I see, got it!"

Alek said that and entered the office with a triumphant look.

I thought of him as a sharp guy during the Battle of Biheiril but I wonder how he really was. It could be that his mind works differently during peaceful times. Yeah that's right, even my concentration changes during battle. That may be it.

But I've gotten a little worried that someone like him is left alongside Orsted...

Part 4

When Aleksander entered the office, his eyes met with the receptionist named Faria Steer. While looking at Aleksander and pondering whether she should ask or not, she finally opened her lips after a moment of hesitation.

“Excuse me, Aleksander-sama.”

“What is it, Faria-san? I’ll be going to find out this *correct* answer that lies in the conference room so please make it short.”

“Rudeus-sama had just now left the premises wearing Orsted-sama’s clothing but... does he intend to do something?”

Upon hearing that, Aleksander made a very surprised face.

“Eh... Rudeus-sama wearing Orsted-sama’s clothes... !?”

Aleksander couldn’t even think about doing something like that. Imitating Orsted’s clothing style was something which was absolutely dreadful to him.

And at the same time, he gulped down his own saliva. The reason why Rudeus was wearing Orsted’s clothes didn’t even require him to think that much. He thought that something needed to be done which could only work with Orsted’s clothes.

Possibly a decoy or something. He thought that Rudeus intended to lure the enemy out while in disguise as Orsted and arrest the enemy. In the meantime, Orsted would be able to achieve an objective.

Which meant that the enemy was so strong that one couldn’t fight the said enemy without Orsted. For example, one of the overlooked World Powers, Technique God or someone who Aleksander had unpleasant memories with, Death God Randolph. Or one of the Demon Slaying Three Heroes, Armored Dragon King Perugius Dola or possibly North God Kalman the Second, Alek’s father, Alex.

Either way, Rudeus had enough potential alone. It was possible that victory could be assured if he were to equip the Magic Armor but then he wouldn't be able to accomplish his job as a decoy.

Even Aleksander knew about Rudeus' bravery. The fearless Rudeus.

Aleksander knew that Rudeus' combat power was inferior to his. However, those movements he saw in Biheiril Kingdom still remained in his memory vividly. That power to face an enemy far stronger than yourself with simple honesty. That was something Aleksander knew well.

It was courage. Rudeus was a hero who had been acknowledged by Atoferatofe herself.

And then, he realised, that this was the *correct* answer.

"Faria-san, please keep that matter confidential."

"Y-yes..."

Faria Steer's neck inclination was gradually coming up to its regular position but Alek paid it no heed and put his hand on the door to the conference room.

He prayed that he would be granted the honor by Orsted to fight alongside that hero someday. While burying those feelings deep within his heart he entered the room.

Though it was only a few minutes after that Alek would ask about the correct answer from Orsted himself.

Chapter 5

Lucy's First Day at School – Last Part

Part 1

I chose a route and started walking, a route with the least people possible. And yet, I felt like I was attracting attention. It was probably because I was currently in disguise. Something called one's imagination.

But even so, others did not have much interest. No, I still felt the surroundings gazes.

But that should be obvious. Orsted had been using the office on the outskirts of town for a while now. There weren't many people who had seen him in person, but there were plenty who knew of this appearance of his. A black helmet and a white cloak.

Right now, my outfit was the same as that of Orsted's trademark. Walking through the town like this, it was natural I attracted attention.

In fact, without the curse, I might be giving a favourable impression to the townsfolk. Maybe I should try the main street. Doing good things to give someone a better image, like in the old days.

The main street was closer to the school too.

“Yep, that's good.”

Killing two birds with one stone.

Improving Orsted's reputation would be a plus for me as well.

Right, next time I should propose a 『Dragon God Festival』 where everybody dresses up in black helmets and white cloaks and dances in ecstasy.

With that in mind, I started moving towards the main street.

“Wha!?”

And, in that instant, I quickly turned around and hid myself.

I had glimpsed a familiar red haired person in the main street. And with that red haired person was the figure of a large white dog. And on the dog’s back were two children.

They were Eris and Leo. And on Leo’s back, Lara and Ars.

Leo, you two-timer! Even though you ran away from a walk with me, you went out with Eris.

No, it was different for me. That was a farce of a walk for my own satisfaction. What Eris and Leo were doing was territorial scouting.

But what do I do now?

I never thought I’d encounter Eris now and here of all places. No, I could probably talk my way past Eris. Like saying we could go visit Lucy together.

“ ... ”

But how would I go about explaining this outfit. She wouldn’t immediately try and stab me right? I’m also worried about the kids. Right now, I was doing something I obviously shouldn’t. I broke my promise with Sylphy. Should my children be allowed to see this pathetic side of their father?

The answer is no.

.....

Now that I gave it more thought, it really wouldn’t be a good idea. I even went to the trouble of a disguise. I should just go back home. I made it this far through a lapse in judgement, but wouldn’t waiting at home with Sylphy and greeting Lucy when she comes back be the better option?

.....

But I wanted to see Lucy in her hour of triumph. I know it's selfish but it's different from what Sylphy said. I definitely wasn't doing this because I didn't trust Lucy. And it's not so I could help her out from behind the scenes. I promise. I swear to God.

Even if she looked as if she was about to cry, I wouldn't lend a hand. At home, I'd properly hear the story from her and only then would I help her out and instruct her.

Nice one Rudeus buddy. That's the line. That's the line that wouldn't break my promise with Sylphy. Though I had decided on things on my own, without consulting with Sylphy first, but as long as I kept that promise, I wouldn't really be going back on her words. But still, after all of this is over, I'll properly tell her and apologise.

It was actually because I wanted to see Lucy in class that I went to look. I'm sorry, I can't hold myself back. Is that alright? Can I do it? Can she get angry if I am honest?

Alright. Good boy, Rudeus.

“Woof! Woof!”

Ah, in any case, it seemed that Leo had noticed me. His nose was twitching and he was looking in my direction.

“What is it?”

Eris noticed too. It's not like it's a problem if I'm found, but explaining this getup would take a while. Getting held up would also be a pain. Let's take a detour.

“Whoever's hiding there! Come out!”

But it was already too late, I was already found out by Eris. These clothes stood out too much...

Now then, what to do. Do I go out or not? If I do, how do I explain it?

No. But... Yes. There's still quite a distance between us. She shouldn't be able to clearly see me yet.

“ ... ”

I showed myself from the waist up. Eris had her hand on her sword and Leo was wagging his tail. And on top of that, Lara, on top of Leo, and Ars sitting as if hugging her, were also looking at me.

The two of them were looking at me blankly, their gazes pure.

“Orsted...?”

Eris looked confused and removed her hand from her sword while I turned around. Nonchalantly.

With movements as if to say that I just coincidentally came across you on the roadside, nothing to worry about.

“...Wait just a minute.”

“Tch...!”

Eris called me to a halt. Was my cover blown? Eris was a Sword King. A warrior who went almost toe to toe with the former Sword God. Looking at my demeanour, you could tell in an instant that I’m not Orsted.

“No, I’m just imagining things. It’s fine. Let’s go, Leo.

But as soon as I stopped, she said that, turned around and started walking. Leo was glancing in my direction but he didn’t chase after me and followed Eris.

The plan was a success.

“ ... ”

My eyes suddenly met with Lara’s and Ars’ on top of Leo.

The dazed Lara and the puzzled Ars. They watched me from Leo’s back.

As if they were sending me off, I left that place.

Part 2

I arrived at the school. I avoided the front gate, climbed the wall and breached the compound. And then aimed for the classrooms.

I may not have participated in many classes, but I did seriously attend the school for many years. I did know where the first year classrooms were. I avoided students getting taught in the schoolyard and those walking during the intervals, heading for the first year classrooms.

This place hadn't changed much either. It hadn't even been a decade since I graduated, but it really felt like that. Though the number of unfamiliar students had increased.

It also felt like there had been an increase in Elves, and Beast and Dwarf races since my time as a student. There also seemed to be a large number of Demon races.

I heard from Roxy in the dining room that the main members of the student council were from the Elven race, and the next chief of the Dwarf race, so that seemed to be reason. It was something that couldn't be seen when Ariel was president.

The amount of other races had increased, but the fact that they were not arrogant anymore was most likely due to the remains of Norn's presidency. Basically she simply did not permit any type of racial discrimination. And that was what caused the current atmosphere of the school.

A small portion of the nobility of the Magic Triumvirate apparently did not approve, but they are like that, proud by nature.

I was walking down the hallway pondering about such things, when suddenly, while I was turning a corner:

“Uff.”

“Ah.”

Almost immediately, someone came from around the corner as well. That person was being followed by five students. No, rather than being followed it was more like being surrounded. When I said being surrounded, it gave off a bad feeling, but it was basically a popular student walking to class with other people. I could see some of the surrounding students holding notebooks, it seemed that there was something they didn't understand and were asking about it.

It's a very admirable thing to do. Yep, that's right, that person would be able to answer anything. And what came out from that person's mouth would undoubtedly be the truth. Well, sometimes that person might be wrong, but that mistake also includes the truth. Those who ask will receive revelation. Liberation.

Let those words resound within you — grasp their meaning, and any may attain strength. Oh students who earnestly accept those words — ponder their meaning and think about how you must live. Oh students, right now, all of you are in bliss.

“...Orsted?”

That person, with suspiciousness lurking beneath those slightly sleepy eyes, looked up at me. Several seconds later, those eyes opened up wide.

“No, Rudy? It's Rudy, isn't it. It's Rudy, right?”

As expected of Roxy. That keen insight of her's wasn't something I could fool.

“...How did you know?”

But I asked nonetheless, because the foolish I couldn't help but seek the truth. Though it was clear to me that it was the wisdom of Roxy. I asked whether she had reached the truth without any real reason.

“It's obvious, the only person with the courage to wear that (Imitate Orsted), would have to be Rudy.”

There was a reason. As expected of Roxy!

“Is Orsted-sama aware of this situation?”

“Yes, this was a suggestion from him after all.”

“I see... Then that means that there’s some reason for it.”

Roxy nodded her head and began scrutinising my outfit. I felt like she had some kind of convenient misunderstanding.

“...”

But is that alright? Should I deceive Roxy? Should I lie to Roxy for a momentary period of selfishness? Is that fine? Rudeus, is that fine with you?

“No, there’s no important meaning to it.”

There’s no way that’s fine. I cannot lie to Roxy. Lying to Roxy has a different implication than lying to Sylphy or Eris. The thought that lying to Roxy in an important situation is something is wrong, that can’t be helped. If I lie here, the next instant, I will come flying in from 20 years in the future and hit myself with a Stone Cannon. Or this very second, I, having lost my identity will suddenly have my limbs melt and turn into an indeterminate existence.

“Then why are you wearing that?”

“Well... I wanted to see Lucy...”

“...Wanted to see? What about your promise with Sylphy?”

“I’m not secretly helping her out or being over protective.

It’s just that, I just— I just wanted to see what she was like in class...”

While I flusteredly said that, Roxy silently looked at me, with reproachful eyes. The surrounding students too were perplexed at such a sudden development.

I’m sorry. I’m sorry.

“...I understand.”

But, Roxy relaxed her gaze.

“As long as you honestly watch over her without lending a hand, I’ll pretend I didn’t see you.

I just saw that Orsted had simply come to the school to inspect it.”

“Sensei...!”

“Just this once.”

“Of course. When I get home, I’m going to apologise to Sylphy too.”

“That’s for the best.”

I’m pardoned. I am no longer any match for her. From now on, I will bow three times in Roxy’s direction, five times a day.

“Well then, I have to teach these children until the next class begins... By the way, do you know where Lucy’s classroom is?”

“Yes. Of course.”

“Well then.”

Roxy said that, gripped my hand once tightly and continued down the hallway. The students saying “Who was that just now!?” followed after her. She’s quite popular. It’s only natural. She’s my teacher after all.

“Alright.”

After I had once again fired myself up, I set off down the hallway.

Part 3

I arrived at the classroom. I was peeking into the classroom from the hall, but then I thought that looking from the hall wasn't a very good idea and circled around. If a rumour that Orsted was peeking begins to circulate, our company's reputation would be affected.

While pondering such things, I made a partitioning screen near the window of classroom. Near a window which was not visible from the surroundings...

“...Wait? Couldn't I have just claimed that I was doing a classroom inspection?”

Roxy said I could after all. I felt like I could have gone and gotten permission to watch. If I had explained it to Jinas, he probably would have done something like that.

I messed up.

Well I guess it's fine. As long as I can see Lucy, I'll be satisfied.

While thinking that, I activated my clairvoyance and looked inside.

Several desks were lined up in the classroom. Students fit to be called first years were sitting in rows. Most were over 15 year old adults. There were some 10 year old kids too but there was basically nobody as young as 7. There were some kids that looked about 7 but they were mostly from the Dwarf race.

Normal humans, Demon race, Elf race, Dwarfs and Beast races. Peaceful people, arrogant people, kind people, there were plenty of them. Sitting in the back of the classroom was someone who looked like an adventurer, giving off an eerie vibe. Wouldn't getting involved with him get you bullied? No, no matter who they are, they wouldn't pick on a 7 year old child.

But where's Lucy... Aah, there she is, in the front row. As expected of my daughter. Sitting right in the front row full of motivation.

Is what I thought, but it seems her desk was too big. Her desk was so big it's hard to see the front. She's seriously listening to the teacher's words and taking notes, but because of the size of the desk she looks like she's having a hard time. After she gets home, it might be good to let her carry a cushion or something to sit on.

Sitting next to her was a girl of about 10. Most likely a Dwarf. No, from the feeling she gave off, she seemed human. From the way her hair was arranged, most likely a noble. She occasionally talked to Lucy while looking at her own magic textbook. She probably didn't think that taking notes was the norm.

Lucy looked at the girl's magic textbook with a serious face and said something while pointing. Because she was whispering, I couldn't really hear her, but she seemed to be teaching her something.

She seems to have already made a friend of a similar age. Have they become friends?

It's still only the first day of class and the teacher didn't seem to have any intention of teaching anything too significant. Looking at the blackboard I could see that they're starting from the basics of the basics. Lucy had already learnt this stuff years ago.

An easy victory.

"Sensei!"

Is what I thought, when Lucy raised her hand.

"Yes?"

"Aggregate magic power isn't decided the moment you're born, it increases when magic is used during childhood. I think what you just said is wrong!"

Compared to what's taught in schools, what Sylphy and Roxy taught her was slightly different. But I feel like it might have been better if she had left it unsaid. Having their own failings pointed out isn't something teachers like very much.

"What's your name?"

"It's Lucy. Lucy Greyrat."

“Greyrat... Which meant you’re Roxy-sensei’s Daughter?”

“Yes!”

“Right, you must have received a special education since you were young.”

The eye’s of the teacher shone.

This teacher, I don’t want to imagine it, but he isn’t about to disrespect Roxy is he?

He wouldn’t disrespect a parent in front of their daughter would he?

I had decided that I would hold back today, I had decided that, but starting tomorrow, your way to home might become a danger zone, you know?

“It’s true that that theory is one explanation. It’s true that may have been the case for your father and mother. It could also have been the case for your father’s apprentice, Juliet-dono. But whether or not it’s reliable has yet to be confirmed. Your father, mother and Juliet-dono may have been special cases. Or it may not apply to Magic and Beast races. It may just be that your father and Roxy are mistaken. There has not been any significant investigation. I will not engage in such research. Therefore, I will teach “Aggregate magic power remains the same throughout one’s life.” Because that is what I believe.”

The teacher spoke in a torrent of words. In order to persuade Lucy, or maybe to persuade himself. Lucy listened to that with a serious face.

“Students, I’d like to hear it from you too. From here on out, you students will study a variety of things. In magic and otherwise. In school and perhaps after graduation, you will study. While you are at this school, we, the pioneers of the art of magic, will teach you all kinds of things. You, as students, may believe in those teaching or not, it is your choice. When things have been proven as wrong, we will admit our mistakes. And if you do prove a mistake in our teachings, it will be you who is teaching us. And if it is what you are saying that is truly correct, we will consent.”

Hmmmmmm. A way of thinking with high flexibility. It didn’t seem like he was a bad teacher. In fact, he seemed like a good teacher.

“That is all. Lucy, do you have any further questions?”

“None! Thank you very much!”

“Good. Please be seated. I will continue with the class.”

The teacher gave a hearty laugh and Lucy sat down. And the applause burst out from the class. Lucy looked backwards surprised, her face became red and she looked down.

It's alright Lucy. You just said something correct. Putting aside whether you're truly correct, those who think you are are giving you applause. So raise your head.

And as I thought that, the girl hesitantly reached out and pet her head and said something. To which Lucy looked up and gave a big smile.

Hmm, hmm.

Please get along with my daughter. It's ok to fight, just get along with her.

Part 4

After that, I continued to watch Lucy's classes for a while. There were some good and bad teachers. But Lucy didn't hesitate and continued to berate the teachers with questions and doubts. The teachers answered, avoided the questions and occasionally pointed out her mistakes and class continued like that.

Lucy stood out. A seven year old girl wilfully motivated to take class was quite rare. During break, while Lucy was eating her lunch, she was surrounded by quite a crowd, and by evening Lucy was already quite popular.

They were surrounding Lucy and asking her all kinds of questions. About her parents, her family, where she lived and about herself. She was without a doubt popular.

Some among them were probably just trying to butter up to my daughter. But that's fine. You can only meet a person once, the starting point may have been self interest, but there are all kinds of ends.

Life is long so it's better to let her seldom associate with bad children.

"Haa."

The last class ended. I was satisfied. I was able to learn Lucy's daily life at school. Of course, I wasn't worried. She was Sylphy's daughter and had been properly taught by her, Eris and Roxy.

There were no worrying factors.

No, well, if I did have a worry, it would be that she was my daughter. Spending everyday in the corner of the classroom with her head down on her desk, was a possibility. No, realistically, that wouldn't have happened. From here on out, there'll probably be plenty of painful things but it'll probably be fine.

After this she'll go to school every day and I'll be content with hearing her stories during dinner each day. While remembering what I saw today I'll be able to eat rice smiling.

I guess I'll go home now. For now, I'll return the cloak and helmet to Orsted.

While thinking that, I removed the mud wall made partitioning screen by rescinding the magic.

“...Ah.”

Standing on the other side of the mud wall was a single woman. White hair and a slender body. Pants that looked easy to move in and a sleeveless top. The white arm extending from her shoulder, her hands placed on her hip and a face with a mix of anger and disappointment.

It was Sylphy.

“Ahem... Do you need something?”

I tried my best to mimic Orsted.

“Rudy, what are you doing here?”

Of course, it was futile.

“No, um... Sylphiette-san, what are you doing here?”

“Lara said that she saw her father hiding his face in a weird outfit while she was out for a walk.”

“Aah... Indeed.”

It was Leo. He betrayed me. He didn't see me, he confirmed it with his nose. Or maybe because Orsted's scent was mixed in, rather than Leo, Lara noticed. Leo and Lara can understand each other after all. No wonder Lara was looking my way.

“...Going as far as to wear that.”

Sylphy's shoulders were shaking. She was very angry.

Sylphy gets crazy when she's angry. I can't say specifically how. I can't say it, but whenever she gets angry or is sullen, I'm generally the one in the complete wrong and I'm pierced by reproachful eyes by everyone in the family. Everything becomes very hard. And for at least a week, I'll be spending the night alone.

"Can you really not trust Lucy and I that much."

Tears started flowing from Sylphy's eyes.

Gloomy. This is a gloomy person. A gloomy person, not an angry one.

For now, I kneeled in front of her right then and there.

"No, that's not it, it's not like that. I just wanted to watch Lucy in all her glory.

I wanted to see her in class, asking the teachers questions. I wanted to watch her diligently studying.

You know, cause I haven't really been here very much while she was growing up."

During my flustered explanation, Sylphy looked at me with her tear-stained face.

"Really?"

"It is. It's just, I couldn't hold back any more, I had intended to tell you after it was over."

"...That's a lie isn't it?"

"It's true. I had intended to apologise to you."

"You wanted to see Lucy in class that much?"

"Yes."

I said that and Sylphy put her hand out and helped me up. She had already stopped crying.

"Then I'm in the wrong here, because even though you only thought about just watching and went so far, I forbade you to even look."

"No, you did nothing wrong. I had agreed to it beforehand after all."

"Yeah... You did."

As we were talking and such, Sylphy's gaze suddenly raised up. The look on her face said she messed up. When I turned around, I understood the reason.

“Aah...”

Before we noticed, the students were already looking at us through the classroom window. And with them, was obviously, Lucy.

Lucy looked at the both of us with a somewhat sullen face.

Part 5

“Um, today, I made friends with a girl called Belinda-chan.”

In the end Sylphy, Lucy and I ended up making up and going home together. Holding Lucy's hands, the three of us were lined up. I thought she would get mad that I came but she wasn't.

One by one, she explained all the fun things that happened today in school.

“You know, Belinda-chan is the daughter of a minister of the Ranoa Kingdom. She's still little, but she's really smart, so that's why she came to school. She says she's going to become the best in the school and make her father notice her.”

“Really? That's amazing.”

“And guess what, the first class was with Blue-Mama. At first, everyone made fun of her and I almost got mad, but then Blue-Mama, she showed us a little bit of magic and everybody was like “wow”. And then Blue-Mama said, “Well, it's up to you whether or not you listen to my class.” She was so cool!”

“Why don't you tell that story to Blue-Mama. I'm sure she'll be happy.”

The plan was thrown out of whack but that in itself was a good thing. Holding Lucy's hand, walking along with Sylphy. Walking along in a line, blocking the path probably isn't a good thing, but what does it matter. This was my city.

“Did you have fun at school Lucy?”

“Yeah!”

Lucy nodded with extreme happiness. When I saw that I thought that there was nothing to worry about.

“See, Papa. Lucy was fine right?”

As if reading my mind, Lucy said that.

“Yeah, you were just fine. Good girl.”

“As expected of Papa’s daughter right?”

“Ahaha, way more amazing than Papa.

Lucy was outstanding. No matter how you look at her, she’s outstanding. Compared to her father who’s not alright at all. A guardian was necessary.

“By the way Rudy.”

Suddenly, Sylphy raised a finger.

“Hm?”

“How long are you going to keep wearing that?”

I looked down at myself. A thick white coat and a black helmet. Up until now I’ve been Fake-Orsted.

“I’ll return it tomorrow.”

Yeah, right. It won’t be a problem tomorrow. I didn’t say I’d have it back by the end of the day, and Orsted isn’t in any rush. But still, this cloak, the fabric sure was nice. It felt similar to a Red Dragon’s pelt, if I asked Aisha, would she know?

“By the way, Lucy.”

While I was thinking that, a question came from my mouth. It was a small question, for the sake of confirming something.

“What is it Papa?”

“It’s a problem. What’s the colour of my hair?”

This questions definitely wasn’t because I didn’t trust her. It’s just to make sure.

“Brown!”

“Correct. Lucy’s smart. I can expect good things from you in the future. As expected of my daughter.”

“Geeze~ Don’t make fun of me~”

As I was laughing at the sullen Lucy, I happily walked down the path.

“But Rudy, you broke your promise, so I’ll have you bear with it for three days.”

“Okay.”

I’ll have to bear with it for a little while, but I’m happy.

Part 6

The next day.

An odd rumour began circulating around the town. Orsted was aiming for Lucy. It's probably because I was walking around dressed like that.

Rumor lasts for only 75 days. I obviously knew that it's groundless, and since Sylphy and the rest of my family knew that too, it was fine.

While thinking that, when I went to Orsted to return the coat, Orsted was glaring at me with a scary face, and I had to come up with an explanation...

But that's a different story.

Orsted's Coat: The material is the pelt of an ancient White Dragon. It carries an absurd amount of magic power, and possesses high physical and magical defence. It possesses self-restoration against ageing and damage. Because the Ancient White Dragon is now extinct, it's a unique Item

Chapter 6

Lucy's Family

— Lucy's Perspective —

My name is Lucy Greyrat. I'm the first-born daughter of the Greyrat House.

I have a big family. I have three Mamas, three small sisters, three small brothers, two Grannys, two Aunts and three pets. There are 16 people in total. It's a big family.

Let's start with my Mama. I have three mamas. They are white-haired mama, blue-haired mama and red-haired mama.

White-haired mama is the one who gave birth to me, and the first to become Papa's wife. Papa said that mama is the youngest and the most spoiled. White-haired mama is a talkative person and she always said this :

"It's important to make friends, okay? And you must never bully the weak, okay?"
She kept persuading me that it's important to make friends.

Blue-haired mama is Lara's mama, and the second wife of my Papa. Papa said that she looks small but she's the oldest, and he relies on her the most. Blue-haired mama is quite a reserved person, but she did say that :

"Live however you want, if you don't understand something then just ask someone."
She never persuaded me about anything, but she knew everything and always answered anything I asked of her.

Red-haired mama is Arus' mother, and the third wife of Papa. Papa said that she looks the oldest but she's actually very immature. Red-haired mama never spoke much but she did say that :

"It's important to protect someone. For that reason you must become strong."

Red-haired mama said that and disciplined me as such.

I think that I have to follow the teachings of my three mamas. I have to make friends, and in order to protect said friends, I have to become stronger. But I must never bully the weak. And if I'm troubled about something then I should ask Blue mama about it. If I do, there won't be any troubles, and I'll be praised as well. Papa too, will praise me saying "You're so smart, Lucy. As expected of the elder sister."

I have 6 siblings in total.

The oldest after me is my younger sister, Lara. She's a very kind kid. Her hair is similar in color to that of Blue mama and her long hair stays in one single braid. She's quite strange too, and is often seen talking with Blond-haired granny and our pet, Beat. Though both Beat and Granny don't talk at all, she's the only one doing the talking.

Since she's like that, staying absentminded most of the time, when she goes out to play, she gets bullied by neighbourhood kids as they try to pull on her braid. Though I immediately go out to help her, she isn't really bothered about it to begin with so it's kind of a let-down. She likes her naps and tends to get on Leo's back to sleep there in peace.

After that is my younger brother, Arus. He's a brave boy. His hair is similar in color to that of Red mama, though it's short, cut and evened up. He's precocious and a naughty kid but he tries to protect me and Lara all the same. I'm sure that he's trying to do the same thing as me, trying to follow her mama's teachings. Red mama expects a lot from him, as such he's been running and practise-swinging the sword almost everyday. He's close with Aunt Aisha and always looks delightful whenever he's near her.

Then comes the youngest brother in my family, Sieg. In simple words, he's a crybaby. He totters behind Arus and starts crying if he's left behind too much. At that time, I scold Arus. In doing so, Arus takes Sieg's hand and the two of them get up on Leo's back.

When Sieg tries to climb on Leo, Lara moves back a bit and let's him take the forward. And then, hugs Sieg tightly from behind so that he doesn't fall off and ends up falling asleep peacefully.

Actually, I know one trait of Sieg that no one knows yet, he's actually very strong. He can pick up really heavy boxes with much ease.

I do have one more younger brother, namely Clive. He's the same age as Arus, though he's not my real brother. He's the child of White-haired mama's granny's. According to mama, he's someone like a cousin to me or so it seems. I don't know why he's called as such but I deal with him as my younger brother anyway. He seems to have a good relationship with Arus, whenever he drops by for a visit he talks with him the most. It seems he likes me quite a bit, he clings to me a lot and whenever I pat his head, he smiles shyly.

My youngest sisters have just been born so I don't know much about them as they are still very small. But I'm sure they will turn out as good girls in the future.

I'm the older sister of all these little brothers and sisters of mine. Since I'm the oldest so I must act properly, or so I've heard a countless times from my mamas. I think that I'm doing just as I'm told. My little sisters and brothers are all cute too, so I do want to protect them.

I also have two Grannies.

The Blond-haired granny is Papa's mother. Her name is Zenith-san. She was a really lovely person once but now she can't talk, even having a conversation with her yields no reply from her. She always looks absentminded and is seen together with Beat in the garden a lot. However, when I feel sorry or get angry, she caress my head for some reason. She's a very mysterious granny.

The Brown-haired granny is Aunt Aisha's mother. Her name is Lilya-san. It seems that she was brought along to serve Grandpa's house as a maid at first, but acts just like how a maid would upto this day. The three mamas are very grateful and tip their hats off to this granny, but for some reason, in the past I wasn't sure just why she was my granny. Once, when I was walking in town, I heard someone saying "A maid is someone from the lower classes, someone to push around for work.". And when I tried saying that back at home, Red-haired mama got really angry and I got scolded. She slapped my butt until it got completely red and told me to reflect upon what I said by throwing me out the house for the night. When

I was shivering, huddled together with Leo, Brown-haired granny was the one who let me inside the house. At that time, granny told me what actually happened. And then, I learned on that day that even though she's a maid, she's still my granny and she shouldn't be pushed around to work.

I also have two Aunts.

Both of them are still quite young, and when I call them aunts they get angry, but an aunt is an aunt. Although to me, they are like elder sisters.

The older aunt is the daughter of the Blond-haired granny, and the younger sister of Papa. Her name is Norn-san. She's a person who always works hard, plays with me a lot, and told me a lot of things. I like this aunt the most. I wish to become someone like her in the future. Though she got married not long ago and has already left the house. She rarely visits and even when she does, she gets into argument with the younger aunt. It looks like they are on bad terms but they can be seen laughing while quarreling often, and there are also times when they look like they are having fun.

The younger aunt is the daughter of Brown-haired granny, and Papa's half younger sister. Her name is Aisha-san. Similar to Brown-haired granny, she always wears maid clothings and manages most of the housework. Whenever I need help with something in this house, she's the one who helps me most of the time. She has basically taught me cooking, laundry and anything that's house related. Mama said that aunt Aisha can pretty much do anything and she's very good at what she does. It seems she also helps out with Papa's work. And yet, she gets scolded by Brown-haired granny from time to time. It's a mystery.

We have three pets.

The big white dog, Leo, is a Sacred Beast. He is very smart and understands what we say to him. It feels like he's watching over us all, Papa said to rely on him if anything bad ever happens. His favourite is Lara, and sticks to her most of the time inside the house.

Armadillo Jiro is Blue-mama's vehicle. He has a timid personality, when scolded he immediately shows his stomach or rolls up into a ball. But if something happens when we're leaving, he growls to intimidate anyone. He too, in his own way, tries to protect us.

Treant Beat is the watchful protector of aunt Aisha's vegetable garden. Since it is a plant monster, I really don't know what he's thinking but he's often seen together with Blond-haired granny and Lara. He's ruthless towards anyone who may lay waste to the crops in garden. It's not a rare sight that we get to see it catch small birds which try to eat the seeds of Papa's favourite Rice, those birds in the end become it's nutrients. It's a little scary, but it never attacks family members. On the contrary, when we approach it, it let's us have a fruit. It is too, a family.

16 people. I have a lot of members in my family. I have lots of mama, and younger brother and younger sisters.

But Papa is alone. He's the only one alone.

I love Papa a lot. It seems like I tended to avoid him since I was a small child. Papa's odour gives me a peace of mind. Sometimes his beard scrapes me a bit, but I like that too. Papa doesn't let me touch his beard much. When it gets a bit muzzy, and I try to touch it, he grabs my hand and says "Sorry, I'll just go and shave it now." and leaves for the bathroom. Though I think it's fine, but Papa may think something otherwise. It's a pity that he doesn't let me touch his beard much, but I don't dislike that part of him at all.

But, it's just that... I think Papa doesn't really expect much from me. I sort of think that way. He cares for me, even loves me a lot, but I think that he doesn't expect much from me.

Surely, it's because Papa is an amazing person. Yep, that's right.

I don't know much but I can somehow understand that Papa is an amazing person. When Papa was as old as me, he could already use Saint Class magic, and far from attending school, he was already at a position where he could teach. When he was 5, he went around playing in town or park, greeted everyone that he met, but all of those people know about Papa and respect him quite a bit. Even the most conceited ones end up praising my Papa.

I know that my Mamas are amazing as well, but I knew since childhood that Papa is a special case. That Papa of mine, not expecting much from me... no, from us is understandable, I think it can't be helped.

But I want Papa to praise me. I will abide by what my mamas has taught me, and I'll protect my siblings as well. In doing so, I will receive a lot of praise from my mamas. But I want Papa to praise me too.

I'm already 7 years old. I'll be attending school from today onwards. A school where adults attend as well, the school where Papa, Blue-mama and White-mama attended. Red-mama never attended this school, but I've heard that she teaches Swordplay from time to time.

"If it's you, it's going to be fine. You'll be just fine if you properly follow what we have taught you" or so Blue-mama had told me but I'm still a bit nervous. A place where adults are in majority. I'm worried whether I'll be able to make friends there, whether I'll be able to do my best. I have some hopes as well but my anxiety is greater.

But I think if I worked hard there, I will be praised by my Papa. "Lucy is amazing. As expected of my daughter." or so I think I'll be praised like that. And then, surely my hopes will be reached as well.

That is why, I'll work hard in order to achieve that goal.

[Story of The Seven Knights of Asura]

Chapter 7

Isolte's Marriage Hunting – First part

Part 1

A long, long time ago.

In the days before the school of the Water God Style.

A certain country was frightened of the Water Dragon King.

Their fishermen had encroached on his territory, and incurred his wrath.

As a result, each day, their fishing boats were attacked, and water dragons frequently appeared in the port town.

The knight order attempted to resist, but due to the dragons' massive size and their ability to move freely through the water the country was rapidly pushed towards ruin.

They were on the precipice of destruction.

In this situation, the gloomy King declared that he would offer both his crown and daughter's hand to any who could subdue the Water Dragon King.

The many knights, brave men, and Heroes who took up the challenge met their end torn to pieces at the hands of the Water Dragon King.

What appeared then was a man carrying a single worn out sword, clad in worn out rags. Dramatizations of this ancient tale depicted him as a splendidly handsome man, but this couldn't have been farther from the truth. His true visage could elicit only one word. Vagrant.

His name was Raydel.

Raydel volunteered before the king saying,

"I will defeat him. Everything will be ok."

With this, the King consented to his challenge.

Many thought he would give up halfway, as there was no way such a sloppy man could do anything.

But Raydel was strong.

He froze over the surface of the ocean, putting a stop to the water dragons' movements. Within a blink of an eye, he approached the Water Dragon King.

Having broken out of the ice, the writhing Water Dragon King rushed to attack Raydel. With his worn out sword Raydel returned the Water Dragon King's unblockable strike slicing its head off with a single slash.

With the Water Dragon King's head in hand, he returned to the country a Hero... Or so, he should have.

The king gave him a fortune great enough to play around with for the rest of his life. That was all.

He could not consent to giving his daughter and crown to this dirty man.

Raydel was not mad but he fell into a deep depression.

He was in love with the princess.

He loved the princess whom he had always watched from afar.

Because his wish to marry the princess was not granted, he thought of leaving the country. Or should he have decided so, he could have easily become the king through sheer force.

But there was someone who got angry in Raydel's stead.

It was the princess.

While reprimanding the King the princess hit him, sent him flying, and left the castle. She chased after Raydel who was leaving the country and clung to his legs , saying:

"I have abandoned my country.

I am no longer a princess, nor do I have a last name.

Even if you obtain me, you won't be able to have the country, you won't be able to become king.

But if that is still agreeable with you, please take me as your wife."

Raydel held the princess in his arms and left the country smiling. The two married soon after, then vanished.

Decades later.

Somewhere in the world, the Water God Style was born.

And in accordance with that story a custom was born. “The spouse of the Water God shall abandon their household”

Part 2

Isolte Cruel.

She is the person in charge of the Asura Kingdom's Water God style school, and the single instructor of the Asuran Knight Order.

She is currently a Water Emperor, but just recently acquired the third out of the five secret techniques belonging to the Water God style.

In a few months she will succeed the name of Water God.

Age unknown.

Appearing in her twenties.

Stunning blue-black hair and dignified features.

Whoever saw her would admit she was beautiful.

But rumour has it that she isn't really all that young.

In the Asura Kingdom, the only person that knows her true age is Lady Ariel.

But now, this woman is currently searching for a marriage partner.

Her long days of training to become the Water God are over.

Although she'll still continue training, this is a turning point in her life, that is to say... She should seriously start considering marriage.

But her search for a husband is a difficult one.

Of course, that's not to say there's no one willing.

She'll soon be the Water God after all.

There are many who have approached her.

Such as fellow Water God style disciples.

Captivated by her beautiful appearance, there are few men whose hearts have not been touched by her sincere training.

That being said, they are swordsmen.

They are those who have decided to make a living through the sword.

There are few men tolerant enough to take on a wife stronger than themselves.
It was Isolte's condition that if they were a swordsman, then they would have to be as strong as her, or at least possess strength of the King class.

For Asuran nobles, female swordsmen have always been popular.
The passive women of the Water God style have a much softer and more graceful demeanour when compared to those of the assertive and violent Sword God style.
Isolte would also be well versed in the etiquette of the imperial court.
A young, pretty, well-spoken girl; the men would be all over her.
And on top of that, she's an established swordsman.
To have a woman like that serve as their wife and to be able to dishevel her in bed at night.
Many Asuran nobles approached her with those thoughts in mind.

Of course, those who approached her with perverted hobbies and vulgar laughs were refused.

But every now and then someone who would make her think "This person might be alright." comes along.

Good looking, good personality and fairly good sword skills.

Those kinds of good looking men are quite good at hiding their perverted interests while flashing a smile and drawing closer.

Very prince like.

Isolte could easily see through guys like that.

The people around would always end up saying things like "He's actually a scumbag, don't bother with him."

Those prince types have good outer relations.

If Isolte cared about such superficiality, she'd have already fallen.

Thinking thoughts like "Well, he'll do."

Even so, those very princes immediately turned her down upon hearing her condition.

"I will soon become the Water God and will name myself, Water God Reida Ria.

If you are to marry me, you must abandon your household.

The spouse of the Water God must not have a last name."

The custom of the Water God.

Not following it wouldn't be disadvantageous and following the custom most likely would not provide any benefit.

It is simply a tradition followed by generations of Water Gods.

Isolte's grandmother, previous Water God Reida also followed this tradition.

Because of this, Isolte's father also didn't possess a last name.

Cruel was the last name of her mother.

And so, Isolte, who greatly respected her grandmother, wished to follow in kind.

But unfortunately, the princes that attempted to fool Isolte were nobles.

They were born as nobles and have lived as nobles.

They had lived for appearances and superficiality.

Even if they were charmed by Isolte, there was none whom they would willingly abandon their family to marry.

Part 3

Isolte was troubled.

She'd been searching for a husband for several years now.

It mostly seemed to be going well, but things always tripped up at the last step.

"At this rate it looks like I won't be able to marry before the succession." Is what she thought.

She was confident.

She had good looks, cooking skill, and was well versed in make up.

There wasn't a day she missed the upkeep of her hair and skin.

She was well-versed in conversation as Water God style training included such skills in its curriculum.

Skills for provoking the opponent and taking the initiative.

Putting them into practise, flattery is simple.

But she was still having to exert herself.

Despite all that, she couldn't get married.

Even Eris and Nina had managed to find partners but she still couldn't.

Well it was probably because they had childhood friends.

There was no law that stated she had to marry.

But she still thought she could overcome that with her own charm.

She was self-conscious.

But she thought that her ideal partner would eventually show himself due to her unceasing effort.

"How many has it been now?"

"...That was the 21st."

21 people had now turned her down.

Including the one's she, herself had turned down, the number was much higher.

"I see."

Right now, Isolte was sitting in her living room facing her brother.

Isolte's brother, Tantris Cruel, was a high level Water God style swordsman.

He was the oldest son of the Cruel house but compared to his little sister, he couldn't be considered especially talented.

He put forth enough effort to make his blood run, but in the end he didn't have the talent to advance any higher.

But he's an honest man.

His grandmother, Reida, had told him "Maybe it's time to make you a saint class." but he had said "I don't need a title unbecoming of my stature." and rejected the offer.

Even when Reida was alive, he'd been in charge of the dojo's administration.

And he'd even looked after Isolte.

"Do you think you're aiming too high?"

"No I don't think..."

"You have a certain level of talent and standing. You have the right to choose a suitable partner. But if you're too picky and can't find anyone, there's no point."

"I understand that."

Isolte had always looked up to her brother.

The two of them had lost their parents at an early age.

Luckily their grandmother was the Water God and they didn't have to struggle to survive, but she was a busy woman and didn't have much time to look after the two of them.

At that time, it was Tantris who took over as the parent.

He had supported her after their parents died and raised her.

The school of swordsmanship is a world of ability.

The talented Isolte surpassed her brother in under 10 years.

But she never stopped looking up to him, and he never stopped supporting her.

"There's no need to think about the honour of the Cruel house.

Living as the Water God, a harsh fate no doubt awaits you.

Forget about status and lineage and pick someone you're comfortable with."

"..."

Tantris was already married and had a child.

Of course they had met with Isolte and talked with her about it.

But Isolte hadn't thought she was very likeable.

She was the daughter of an Asuran noble.

Her father had sent her to get married to create a relationship with the Water God Reida.

She obviously looked down on Tantris and had no understanding of Swordplay.

She had never once come to the dojo.

Aside from things relating to the children, the two mostly lived apart.

Isolte didn't want to marry someone like that.

It's exactly because of that, that Isolte had been so careful in choosing.

...Although her carefulness extended only to stripping away their facade's.

But she had stuck by the requirement of at least intermediate level swordsmanship.

She had no intention of fussing over lineage.

But now that she had become the main instructor, she would have many chances to meet with Ariel and talk to her and there were many coming to meet with her who wanted to take advantage of that.

A fallen noble, a commoner, or an adventurer would have been fine.

As long as they're able to make up for it in some other way.

"I have no intention of choosing."

"Then are you ok with someone I choose for you?"

"No, I should be allowed to search for my own partner."

And she was also very stubborn.

Of course there's also the fact that everyone Tantris recommended were nothing but muscleheads...

Although you couldn't call her picky, she absolutely wouldn't concede on her conditions. It really didn't seem likely that she would be able to marry.

"Right..."

Tantris had no intention of blaming her.

It wouldn't be the first time the Water God was without a spouse.

And he could continue the Cruel line himself.

But he still wanted to help his little sister find happiness.

And if his sister wanted to find happiness in marriage, he wanted to support her.

That said, if she didn't want his help, he had no intention of pursuing.

Although he didn't have much talent, he was still a man of the Water God school.

"Oh right, Isolte, didn't Her Majesty summon you today?"

"...Yes."

"Are you fine on time?"

"I'm still good."

"Just in case, you shouldn't keep Her Majesty waiting. We'll stop the conversation here today. Have a safe trip."

"Yes brother.¹ I'll be off now."

Isolte said that, bowed, and returned to her own room.

After that she changed and headed for the Imperial Palace.

After seeing her off, Tantris breathed a sigh of relief.

"Haaa..."

At this rate it'll probably be impossible for her to get married before the succession ceremony.

After thinking that, Tantris returned to the dojo and resumed his instruction of the younger disciples.

Part 4

Isolte walked to the Asura Kingdom's Silver Palace.

The crest of the shield bearing battle girl carved onto the breastplate of the silver armour is one that is famed throughout the land.

Her white and blue coat fluttered through the air as she marched forward.

The patrolling soldiers stood at attention with admiration in their gazes as she walked towards the palace.

There isn't anybody in the Asuran Imperial Palace who doesn't know the name of the Water Emperor Isolte.

And there are many soldiers who yearn for her dignified figure.

By the way, there aren't many who know that she's been having thoughts along the lines of "I don't want to get married too late." or "I hope a good guy would fall from the sky."

"Why if it isn't Isolte-dono, where are you headed?"

The person standing in front of her was a single man.

He was short and lanky with thin hair, overall he seemed very timid.

He looked about 40 years old.

He was human, but if Rudeus saw him, he'd probably think "He's looks like a senile old man."²

No matter how you looked at him, he didn't seem like a knight or a swordsman, but he was wearing the same silver breast plate as Isolte.

But his armour had a slightly different design.

His crest was a girl praying with a rampart crown atop her head.

"Well if it isn't Lord Ifrit. My good graces to you sir."

"Ahh, be at ease. We are of the same rank, there is no need kneel."

Sylvester Ifrit.

One of the Seven Knights of Asura The 『King's Rampart』 .

He with a name that didn't match his face, was the chief executive in charge of the defence of the Imperial Palace.

Isolte was only a knight.

Knights were of a fairly low class, whereas nobility was quite high.

And Sylvester held the highest position among all knights and soldiers, and was also a middle ranked noble.

Normally any servant who crossed his path would immediately fall to their knees.

"But..."

"We are both knights of Her Majesty."

In response to his sharp words, Isolte stood back up.

"That is sufficient. We do not work for the country, but for Her Majesty. The only person you should kneel before is Her Majesty, herself."

In response to Sylvester's rising aura, she swallowed her words and nodded.

Sylvester was of small stature.

He was prone to illness and could not be called strong.

He was in no way skilled with swords or magic.

And yet in spite of that, he had managed to graduate as the valedictorian of the knight academy.

He raises people up and is well versed at command.

He truly understood the meaning of the phrase, "Right person for the right job."

And for that one talent, Ariel dragged him out from an obscure corner of the country, called him back to the palace, and appointed him as her knight.

"By the way Isolte-dono, where might you be heading?"

"Her Majesty has called for me."

"If that is the case then you haven't the time to be wasting it with someone like me."

"Did you have some business with me?"

"It's nothing major."

There's simply a man I would like to introduce you to.

I hope you'll forgive the selfishness of my foolish son, but time permitting, if you are interested, I hope you'll at least have a couple of words with him."

This was a conversation Isolte very much was interested in.

She wanted to hear more about this foolish son of his.

But she was currently being called by her lord.

"I understand. When I have the time, I'll come and we can finish the conversation."

But she simply said that with a stiff face and headed off

On her way to the inner palace, the amount of people decreased.

The simply dressed soldiers began to become scarce, being replaced by lavish knights.

These lower ranked nobles, befitting of their titles' as knights, had all pledged allegiance to Ariel.

Those who had an extremely small chance of betrayal.

And in the inner section of the inner palace, there were even fewer people.

By now the soldiers and knights had disappeared and she was walking through an empty hallway.

Occasionally, there was a frighteningly sharp looking maid - The Imperial Maids - passing by.

These Imperial Maids were personally chosen by Ariel.

There possibility of betrayal was even lower.

Ariel was in the 『King's Chamber』 .

Standing in front of the extravagant door was a single man.
He was completely covered in golden armour and holding a giant battleaxe.
The Asura Kingdom's greatest gatekeeper.
The possibility of him betraying Ariel was non-existent.

"Isolte Cruel! Reporting for summons!"
"...Yessir."

Doga had received Isolte's introduction and slowly moved.
They seemed like clunky movements.
But Isolte couldn't see a single opening.
If it came to it, he could swing that battleaxe of his at terrifying speeds.
And if it came to it, breaking past this man and passing through the door behind him would be nigh on impossible.

"...Hm?"

Doga had extended his hand towards Isolte.
Isolte saw that and looked confused.

Doga had a simple face.
It wasn't crude but Isolte wasn't fond of it.
Being searched by someone like that sparked a slight amount of resistance in her.

"Body search? Go ahead."

But this was the Queen's room.
And obviously, even her knights could not be permitted to bring weapons into the room.
Doga understood that weapons could not be brought into her room.
Even against the prime minister of the Asura Kingdom, Doga would still carry out his meticulous search and not even the smallest of things would get past him.

The body search was a matter of course.

While wondering if he was going to touch her breasts, Isolte silently decided to bear with it.

"Yessir."

But Doga didn't touch her.

What his extended hand had touched was her hair.

Doga moved his hand up to her hair and grabbed something out of it

"...?"

In Doga's fingers was a flower petal.

"Follow me."

"?"

"Isolte is pretty, so you can't have these kinds of things on you."

Doga was smiling under his helmet.

Isolte stood there stiff with a blank expression.

"Aah, my weapon."

Isolte suddenly thought that and unfastened her sword belt and presented it to Doga.

Doga didn't even take that.

"Isolte is Ariel-sama's knight. For you to protect Ariel, a weapon is necessary."

"..."

He didn't conduct a body search.

He didn't take her weapon.

He trusted her as Ariel's knight.

The man who possessed the ability to join the 5 fingers of the Asura Empire.

Thinking about it like that, her heart rate slightly increased.

(No, not with that face...)

She took a deep breath to calm her buzzing head.

"Isolte Cruel! Entering!"

"Come in."

She waited for Ariel's response and entered.

Part 5

The Seven Knights of Asura.

With Luke Notos Greyrat, the 『King's Dagger』 as the head, they are seven knights who have sworn absolute allegiance to Ariel herself.

Even among knights they possessed a special position and independent movement was permitted to some extent.

Isolte was also a member.

The 『King's Greatshield』 .

To defend the King at all times, a fitting name for a Water God style swordsman.

Isolte, Sylvester, Doga.

These three are known as the 『Three Knights of the Left』 .

Among the seven knights of Asura their main job was the protection of Ariel.

But Isolte felt something was off.

The seven knights of Asura were knights who had pledged absolute allegiance to Ariel.

At least that's what was said.

Because Isolte hadn't gathered with them and met them yet, she wasn't deeply informed about them.

They may have pledged loyalty to Ariel, but most of them are unrelated to the Asura kingdom, having been gathered from outside.

They most likely each have their own reasons to unconditionally serve Ariel.

But Isolte was different.

Isolte had a reason to betray.

The previous Water God.

The moment when her grandmother had died.

The death of the previous Water God Reida

During Ariel's battle for the crown she had been killed by Ariel's supporter, the Dragon God, Orsted.

Of course, it had happened during a battle.

Isolte was a warrior who had no intention of harbouring unnecessary emotions after a battle had come to a close.

This was because before she was Isolte's grandmother, she was the Water God.

If she were to defy Ariel, more so than the Asura Empire, the Water God school would see to her banishment.

And thus, she wouldn't think of defying Ariel.

Isolte's resolve was clear on that.

But no matter how sure of it she was herself, if all she had was words, nobody could be certain it was the truth.

Nobody could see the depths of another's heart.

It was entirely possible that after her grandmother had been killed, she had been secretly harbouring hatred and secretly aiming for Ariel's life.

Or maybe instead of Ariel, she could be aiming for the perpetrator, Orsted.

In truth, when Ariel was taking the crown, she had a large number of knights and nobles killed.

And the amount of people who still hold grudges was not small.

They continue their everyday lives having pledged loyalty to Ariel, awaiting their opportunity.

It wouldn't be strange for Isolte to be thinking the same way.

Isolte had sworn the knights oath and pledged loyalty to Ariel.

But it wasn't because of Ariel's personality, nor was it due to patriotism.

It was to protect her honour and place as Water God.

She was currently protecting their relationship of mutual trust, but if that was jeopardised, it's possible that she couldn't guarantee absolute loyalty.

It's not as if she thought of betrayal.
It's simply that the possibility exists.
That's something that Isotle herself understood.

And yet in spite of that, she was chosen as one of the seven.

She was uneasy.
There had to be some kind of catch.

"Isolte, do you have any intention of considering a marriage candidate of my referral?"

Which is why, even in the face of that suggestion, she was weary.

"Why would your Majesty mention such a proposal?"

"To me, having you, the Water God, settle down with a family would be a plus to your work. The candidates are all of my blood, and there are many who possess rather particular sexual dispositions among them... But there has to be one who matches your tastes."

"Of your blood... Do you mean to say that they're royalty!?"

"Yes, that is the case."

A marriage interview with royalty.
Hearing that did not cause excitement in Isolte.
It was of little matter.

"But when I become the Water God they will have to abandon their household, for royalty, isn't that somewhat inconvenient?"

"Even without the name, their blood still remains. They do not have to actively cut off their family do they?"

"That is the case."

"It's fine. They all acknowledge this condition.

They have been promised that if they marry you, the support of the royal family will not be withdrawn.

All you need to do is meet with them and pick the most good natured out of the bunch."

This was definitely a ploy to win her over, is what Isolte thought.

Because the conditions were too favourable.

Ariel's relatives, royalty.

They may only be a branch, but these are people who could be called genuine princes.

They aren't the sons of nobles, they are people, no matter how small, have the possibility to become king. A true Prince.

And all those of the Asuran royal family are good looking and refined.

"How does it sound? It's not a bad deal right?"

"Please allow me!"

Isolte gave an immediate reply.

She didn't have a reason to refuse.

If she was a sly Asuran noble, she may have taken the time to consider the hidden meaning behind Ariel's words.

But unfortunately she was just a swordsman.

Although she may have been a girl searching for a husband.

She didn't care about anything complex.

"Then sometime in the near future we'll begin the marriage interviews. Please convey to Luke or Sylvester on which days you are free. You can leave the rest to me."

"Yes ma'am, I thank you for your kindness."

"Understood. Then, you may leave."

Isolte withdrew from Ariel's private room in a dreamy state of mind.

(A marriage interview with royalty...)

Isolte was somewhat light on her feet and her heart was beating with excitement.

She was going to go tell Sylvester to book her closest day off.

When she thought that, she suddenly realised that she was quite thirsty.

It must have been nervousness from being called out for an unknown reason.

“I’m quite thirsty...”

“Yessir.”

While mumbling to herself, suddenly being called out to from behind caused Isolte to fall into stance and turn around.

And Doga was standing there.

The huge man standing there with the small cup.

“Here, it’s cold.”

“Thank you very much.”

Isolte took it and after wondering for a moment whether there was poison in it, drank it down.

Like Doga said, it was cold as if it had been ice just moments ago and her thirst was quenched.

Feeling the water permeate the depths of her body, she realised that she was far more nervous and tired than she had thought.

“...Haaa.”

“Isolte, good work.”

Doga drank some water took a breath and gave a smile.

Even through the helmet, she could tell that that smile had no ulterior motives and was simply an honest gesture.

“ ... ”

She was a perceptive person.

She realised that she wouldn’t hesitate to leave her back to this man.

Although she wasn’t fond of his face.

“Good work to you too Doga. Best wishes with your guard duty.”

“Yessir.”

Well that's something in and of itself.

Reminding herself of the upcoming marriage interviews, that she'd be spending the next few days absorbed in, she cut off the conversation and walked off smiling.

Author Q&A

Q: Not being able to beat Doga even after becoming the water God, does this mean that her ability is below the World Power class?

A: It's not that she can't win.

It's just that she practises defence techniques, so breaking past Doga to get into the room would be quite hard.

Q: Isolte-san is worn out!

A: It's just that she doesn't have an eye for people.

She's quite capable as a swordsman.

Q: Is Doga's face bad?

A: He has a harmless looking face.

He's a looks like a good person.

Chapter 8

The Gatekeeper Doga – First Part

Part 1

In the Asura Kingdom there's a group known as the Seven Knights of Asura. They are those who have pledged absolute loyalty to Ariel Anemoi Asura.

Leading them:

The 『King's Dagger』 Luke Notos Greyrat.

In charge of offence are the Three Knights of the Left-Wing:

The 『King's Greatsword』 Sándor von Grandeur.

The 『King's Halberd』 Oswald Eurus Greyrat.

The 『King's Hound』 Ghyslaine Dedorudia.

In charge of defence are the Three Knights of the Right-Wing:

The 『King's Gatekeeper』 Doga.

The 『King's Rampart』 Sylvester Ifrit.

The 『King's Greatshield』 Isolte Cruel.

Seven people.

There are those whose birth and descent are clear,

but others were those who Ariel and Luke had personally scouted.

From commoners and lower ranked nobles to high ranking officials, there was even a half Immortal among them.

But what they shared was their undying loyalty towards Ariel.

While Isolte is pondering the true meaning behind the “particular” in Ariel’s statement “rather particular sexual dispositions”, let’s take a look at one of those knights.

Part 2

He was born in a small village of the Asura Kingdom's Donati province.

He was a little slow and treated like a henchman by the other kids.

But his body was strong and he never got sick.

His father was a soldier who protected the village and spent most of his days away.

There were very few soldiers so he didn't get many days off and ended up spending most nights away from home.

When the boy was around 5 years old, his little sister was born.

She was a sweet girl just like her mother.

But the mother had a difficult time recovering from childbirth and passed away.

The boy cried.

He was hit by his friends and he was stung by a bee, but the stupefied boy continued to cry.

The crying boy's father said this to him:

“Right now you can cry, but when you stop, you have to protect this girl.”

Holding his little sister, the boy looked up at his father and nodded many times over.

And that day, the boy stopped crying.

The next day the boy began faithfully practising to realise his father's command.

The command to protect his sister.

To protect his sister he began to guard the entrance to his house.

The whole day, holding a hatchet he found in the corner of the house, he stood at the entrance.

Only when his sister cried did he leave his post, in order to comfort her.

Seeing his figure, his friend laughed.

“The hell you doing?” he said.

“You can just watch from inside,” he said.

The adults of the village had said this to him:

“If you want you can leave your sister to us.”

“There are already plenty of children at our house so one more won’t matter.”

But the boy firmly refused to hear it.

He had them teach him how to take care of her, but he would not entrust his sister to anyone else.

One day.

An incident occurred at the village.

In the middle of the night, something had snuck into the barn and laid waste to the livestock.

From the footprints’ size it was judged to be a wolf.

Soldiers were running around telling the villagers to stay inside and lock their doors.

The next day.

A single house had been attacked.

The wolf had gotten in through who knows where, instantly bit off a child’s head, and escaped through a window.

After waking up, without knowing what happened, the family simply chased after the blood trail.

And on the outskirts of town, finding children’s clothing in a pool of blood, they went crazy.

These two incidents made the soldiers realise that they were mistaken in their judgement.

It wasn’t a wolf that was hiding in the village, but a magic beast.

It was only the size of a regular wolf, but it was a cunning magic beast.

The perpetrator was a magic beast.

Its head and hind legs were that of a wolf’s.

But from the shoulder down it was a monkey. It could walk on two legs and climb trees.
It was only about the size of a large dog.
But its head was oddly large in comparison to its body.
And that head gave it intelligence.
It was a mutated magic beast.

The magic beast who wondered what humans tasted like, was lurking in the wheat fields as if ridiculing the frightened villagers, searching for its next target.

But the adults didn't return to the field that day.
The wolf chased after them but looked in the wrong place.
What was left in the house were two children.

The magic beast, licking its lips, used its monkey arms to climb the chimney, descending into the fireplace.

The next day.

The boy's father who had finished his patrol saw a trail of blood coming from his own house.

"This can't be," he thought with an ashen face as he ran inside his house. He soon found the cruel corpse of the figure left behind.

It was the corpse of the magic beast.

The corpse of the beast with its head smashed open.

And between the corpse and his daughter was his son, standing imposingly, clutching his hatchet.

He could see that the beast was dead.

The boy was covered in blood and his arm was broken.

But that was all.

The magic beast was small but it did resemble a wolf.

It was several times bigger than the boy.

And in spite of that, the boy had beaten it to death with his blunt hatchet.

He had protected his sister.

That was the boy's — who would later become known at the North Emperor Doga — first battle.

Part 3

From thereon the life of the gatekeeper Doga continued.

When he was ten, he protected the entrance to his village.

Right before the teleport incident, a wild stampede of magic beasts occurred .

They swelled forth from a forest in the kingdom and some number of villages suffered.

Some were even engulfed and completely destroyed.

Doga's village was among those attacked.

But Doga, with his dauntless courage and hatchet, diverted the swarm.

It's said that he defeated nearly a hundred beasts during the battle,

And although he had defeated so many, his father had passed away during.

Doga simply stood bewildered next to his father's body.

The knights who saw Doga's courage recommended him to the imperial garrison.

Seeing Doga hesitate for the sake of protecting his sister, they said this:

“Listen boy, we've been separated from our families and move all over the kingdom protecting villages.

In other words, we protect the very country itself.

As long as the country is at peace, our families can live in safety.

Meaning that protecting the country is protecting your family.”

At that time, the simple-minded Doga didn't understand those words.

In the end, what caused Doga to move was money.

After his father had died, he needed money. He had heard that he would be able to get the money for the two of them to live in the Imperial capital and decided to move there.

Doga entered the Imperial army.

He was in charge of protecting a small gate cutting off the slums from lower class residences.

In case those of the slums tried to riot, it would create a bottleneck preventing them from swarming.

Besides the fact that passage was prohibited at night, it wasn't a particularly important gate.

He and his sister had been allocated a single room.

It was small, but it was home.

He would commute from there to his post each day and man it from dawn till dusk and sometimes even all night.

Doga was a simple man, but he had a strange charm to him.

At first the other soldiers didn't look kindly towards a ten year old working with them and there were many who harassed him.

But due to his honest personality and his resolute attitude towards his sister, his co-workers began to relax somewhat and in about a year's time began to recognise Doga as a comrade.

Two years later.

One night, a certain girl ran towards the gate he was guarding.

The girl clung to Doga and asked him to save her.

While Doga was hesitating, a group of men with harsh glares appeared and yelled, "Hand us the woman!".

Doga was bewildered and had no idea what to do.

If Doga's watch partner Hans hadn't been dozing off, he probably could have come to a decision.

The woman, seeing Doga confused, quickly ran towards the gate.

Doga immediately grabbed her by the back of the neck and pulled her back,

Because passage is prohibited during the night.

But in that instant,

Sensing that the woman was trying to run away, they gave chase.

Doga swung his battleaxe.

He had gotten the axe as a farewell gift from the village blacksmith.

All of them died.

Seeing Doga covered in blood, the woman wet herself and sunk to the ground.

Hans woke from the noise and was taken aback by the scene before him.

“This is bad,” he thought.

Doga, who had killed them all, would be punished.

And he, who had been dozing off, would also be punished.

While thinking that, with his face ghastly white, he went to confirm the bodies.

After seeing their faces, he realised that they were members of the violent thieves’ guild that had mixed in with the lower class citizens.

The knights stationed at the slums were lacking manpower and couldn’t do very much to them.

But Doga had annihilated them all.

Doga was promoted.

From a soldier who protected the entrance to the slums,

To guarding the gate that connects the lower and middle class districts.

And for some reason Hans came with him.

Doga continued to protect that gate for some time after that.

Through rain and wind he continued to protect it.

Even as he grew up he continued to protect it.

Hans had saved the simple Doga.

Eventually, Hans became the person who understood Doga the best.

And in that time, his little sister grew more and more beautiful and married Hans.

Or maybe, Hans had been aiming for Doga's sister.

But to Doga, it didn't matter either way.

Because, although Hans was always sleepy, he wasn't a bad guy.

For his sister's sake, Doga bore witness to their vows to Saint Millis.

And Doga was alone.

Now that his sister was married, he thought about how he had completed his father's order to the very end.

There wasn't any need to guard the gate anymore.

But Doga continued to guard it.

Through rain and wind he continued to protect it.

One day, massive news spread like a wave all throughout the capital.

It was declared that Ariel Anemoi Asura would be crowned Queen.

For several days, festivals continued throughout the city.

Doga and his comrades were excited and Hans was jumping for joy.

But a soldier's work increased during a festival.

Their guard post was moved from the middle class district to somewhere else.

The kingdom was recruiting temporary civilian soldiers, so real soldiers like Doga were given much more important duties.

And in turn, their wages increased.

Doga and Hans thought they could use the extra money to buy his sister something nice and worked hard.

On a certain day before the coronation.

Due to some twist of fate, Doga was stationed at the back door of the palace.

It was a fairly disused door where occasionally someone with a permit would come through.

Hans wasn't with him.

Doga was with several other soldiers.

A single man wearing a worn-out armour and holding a long pole came along.

He said:

"Could you let me through here? I'd like an audience with Her Majesty Ariel."

Of course the guards refused him.

"You may not pass without permission! Show us your permit!"

"I don't have a permit, but I'd like an audience with Her Majesty Ariel."

"You may not pass without a permit! Leave!"

"Then it can't be helped. I thought I might have darkened Her Majesty's authority on this auspicious day, I'm glad I came through this back door."

The man said that and began to force his way through.

His pole moved like magic and the other guards were defeated in an instant.

Only Doga remained.

No matter how many times the pole was thrust at his vitals, Doga continued to stand and protect the gate.

But at the same time, Doga's axe didn't hit the man even once.

Having his axe miss was a first for Doga, but he continued to single-mindedly swing.

The man was extremely happy to fight Doga.

"Wonderful! For a man like this to be buried here!

Right, For your sake I'll give up on this gate.

I'm really sorry about this.

As an apology, would you be willing to become my disciple?

You'll definitely become strong, you have talent!."

Doga didn't understand what the man was saying.

Hearing that the man was going to give up on the gate caused Doga to hesitate for an instant

It truly was but an instant.

And when Doga awoke, the man was still there.

Doga picked up his axe and stood to protect the gate.

But he was surrounded by a large number of soldiers.

"Well good morning! I protected the gate in your stead!"

That was how Doga met Sándor, North God Kalman the Second, Alex C Ryback.

Part 4

The day he became Sándor's disciple, Doga returned to his house, collapsed on his bed, and slept like a log.

Thanks to the healing magician that came with the reinforcements, there wasn't a single wound left on him.

But his battle with North God Kalman had completely emptied his nearly bottomless stamina.

It was the first time in his life that he had collapsed from exhaustion.

After sleeping for two straight days, he awoke.

Next to his bed was his crying sister and a relieved Hans.

And Sándor with a happy look on his face.

"Morning! Now my disciple, let us be off!"

Sándor used his tremendous strength to lift Doga to his feet and after Doga had put his armour on, he began to drag him out to who knows where.

Doga, without knowing what from, asked Hans to save him.

"Sorry Doga, but it doesn't seem like a bad thing.

I don't have any idea what's going on either but I think it's a pretty prestigious offer.

So well, why don't you just give it a try? Work hard, I'll be heading out now."

"Ok. Brother, good luck."

Although Hans had seemed to understand the basic gist of it, Doga was still confused.

But he didn't have the strenght to go against Sándor, and they headed to the gate he guarded yesterday.

After they reached the gate, Sándor took out a rather gaudy permit and they passed through.

And before long they were in the inner palace.

While Doga was constantly surprised by the dazzling rooms around them, Sándor had noticed something.

What they had seen was the beautiful golden haired woman in front of them.

"Is that him?"

"Yes Your Majesty!"

"I'd like to talk to him."

Coming out from behind Sándor, Doga stood in front of the woman.

The woman was extremely beautiful and above all sublime.

"I am Ariel Anemoi Asura. What would your name be?"

Doga didn't know that name.

Doga was on guard duty and hadn't heard her name at the coronation ceremony.

And of course, he hadn't seen her before either.

But once he realised, Doga fell to his knees.

Somehow he felt that he had to.

"I-I'm... Doga."

"Why did you become a soldier?"

"M-my dad told me to pr-protect my sister..."

Doga wasn't all that good at talking.

In all his life, although he listened to plenty of other people, he had never said very much.

But the words that came from his mouth had convinced Ariel.

"To protect your sister, a splendid goal."

"B-but, Hans is already protecting my sister, so Hans and my sister are together and um,"

The soldier next to Ariel had added "His sister is married to a soldier named Hans".

Doga didn't know, but it was Luke.

"So she doesn't really need me to protect her anymore..."

Doga looked downhearted as he said that but Ariel smiled.

"That is incorrect Doga."

"Hmm?"

"You cannot stop looking after her."

"What do you mean?"

"Hans has become your brother, so you must now protect both your brother and your sister. Your work has doubled."

Those words caused Doga a shock.

He hadn't thought about it like that before.

But she was correct.

Hans addressed Doga as a brother.

Hans was his brother.

If he was to protect his sister, he would obviously protect his brother.

"R-right! I have to keep protecting them!"

"Yes, but with your current method, it's possible that you may not be able to protect them both."

"Wha!? Why?"

"You are strong, but your arms are short. If those two are to fall into danger, it's possible that you may be too far to help."

Doga looked at his hands.

He remembered his father's death.

He had been close by, but had been killed by a beast outside of Doga's vision.

"Th-then, what should I do?"

"Protect me."

"Wha?"

"I work for the sake of the country to improve it. To protect me, is to protect this country. And to protect the country is to protect those two."

Doga didn't understand.

Why would protecting the person in front of him, protect those two?

He had no clue.

But the way Ariel said it had left him with no doubt.

And at the same time, he remembered something similar someone once said to him.

The knight who had recommended him to the imperial capital.

"Listen boy, we've been separated from our families and move all over the kingdom protecting villages.

In other words, we protect the very country itself.

As long as the country is at peace, our families can live in safety.

Meaning that protecting the country is protecting your family."

Back then, he hadn't understood.

Because he didn't get it, he moved for money.

But now, he somewhat understood.

Because Doga is protecting something in a completely different place, Hans and his sister can live in peace.

"Doga. Would you swear loyalty to me and protect not only I, but the kingdom as well?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Then Doga, I now appoint you a knight."

That day, Doga became one of the Seven Knights of Asura.

Part 5

Since then, Doga had continued to protect the Final Door.

The Final Door, the entrance to the King's chambers.

At times he would head out on Ariel's orders.

Once a day, not too far from Ariel's door, he would receive instruction from Sándor.

And once a month on his day off, he would go visit his sister and Hans to eat with them.

When Doga wasn't around, someone else was protecting the king's door in his stead.

Much of the time it was the 『King's Greatshield』, Isolte Cruel.

But it wasn't like that to start with.

He was appointed a knight and presented with a shiny set of golden armour.

And after taking his post he did not move.

After he had decided to protect it, he couldn't leave it to someone with half hearted resolve.

For an entire month, he left the door to no one other than Sándor.

If he wasn't ordered to rest by Ariel, he would have continued standing there without even eating for days.

He would check anyone approaching the King's chambers.

Gender had no relevance, and would even take the smallest fork.

And in that time, someone had joined the Seven Knights.

The 『King's Greatshield』, Isolte Cruel.

She was the head instructor and in the time before Ghyslaine joined, was the only female member and eventually took the job of Ariel's personal guard.

One day.

Sándor, for the sake of finding members to join the Golden Knight Order, was to search the kingdom.

Without Sándor, Doga had no replacement.

After an entire month of standing without break, Doga collapsed.

Sándor decided that Isolte and Doga were to have a match.

At that point, Sándor named Doga a 『North King』 .

Although Sándor had only recently started teaching him, Doga was quite skilled.

But it goes without saying, it was Isolte's overwhelming victory.

Doga's battleaxe was ward off like a gentle breeze. Time after time, he was countered and eventually defeated.

It was to the extent that if they had been using real swords, Isolte could have killed him in an instant if she wished.

Doga continued to attack Isolte with his inexhaustible stamina but couldn't lay a single finger on her and was defeated.

The slender woman who was like a flower, continued to blow off the axe that was bigger than herself and continued to attack.

As Doga took that hit over and over, he had to admit:

She was someone fit to protect the door in his stead.

And at the same time, he understood,

This woman was a graceful and lovely flower.

Something he could not touch.

Doga had fallen in love with Isolte.

Part 6

"You seem pretty down lately..."

Doga was having dinner with his sister's family when he was told that. In front of the simple looking Doga were a number of dishes on the table. And on the other side of the table was his sister and her husband Hans. And sitting across from Hans was their daughter. Doga was sitting there blankly filling his mug of wine to the brim.

"Are you not feeling well?"

"...Wh-why?"

Having perceived unrest in Doga's heart, Hans pointed to the food.

"Eat it all up alright."

Looking at it, it was obvious to see that he hadn't eaten much.

It was his beloved sister's cooking.

Normally, Doga would be wolfing down his food in silence, swallowing enough to make his cheeks bulge with a happy look on his face.

Along with his favourite wine.

He loved wine that was normally reserved for special occasions, so much so that he would even drink it here.

And for that reason, Hans made sure to always have a barrel ready at their house.

But for some reason, he hadn't even eaten half his food and the way he was drinking his wine seemed somehow worn out.

To those who knew Doga, something was definitely off.

"If you aren't feeling well, why don't you go see the castle's healers? You're already a knight, if you ask, surely they'd do that much for you? Well at least you don't look too bad."

"...?"

Doga puzzlingly tilted his head.

He himself didn't realise something was off.

"If you're tired, why not get a little more rest? I know that working as a guard for her majesty is a prestigious job and all. But if you were working too hard and collapsed, it wouldn't be a joke... Well, I can't really imagine you collapsing though."

"Yessir."

Doga nodded and started eating.

But he was definitely odd.

It was, as always, delicious.

But the second the food went down his throat, he felt something off.

Normally, he would chew and swallow so fast, you'd want to tell him to slow down.

But not this time.

Each time he reached to put something in his mouth, a feeling of rejection welled up from his stomach.

As if he was full, but much more unpleasant.

The wine was also odd.

It wasn't all that nice.

He'd normally look refreshed after taking a swig, but now he looked somewhat sick.

"If something happened, tell us."

"..."

Hans began to press the silent Doga for answers.

"Mr. brother-in-law, no, Doga. Ever since we were stationed together in the slums, I've always been grateful to you. If you can't even let me help you... How can I keep living with myself? How could I show my face to saint Millis?"

"Yessir. But, I don't get it either."

"Lately, has there been something at the castle? Anything? Tell us."

Doga raised his head and saw Hans's serious look.

Doga, like he was told, started to look back in his memory and slowly began talking.

While guarding the Final Gate, a cat had wandered by. He had just finished his lunch and it made him happy.

While walking through the town in his armour, a young soldier had called out to him "You're my idol!" and it made him happy.

While he was guarding the Final Gate, Isolte had come by and when he took a leaf out of her hair, she thanked him and it made him happy.

When Sándor was teaching him a new technique and complimented him, it made him happy.

When he was walking back to the soldiers' lodgings, and a carriage driver nearly ran him over yelling "Beat it dumbass!" but Luke came out from it and even walked him back and that made him happy.

When he arrived at the training ground on Sándor's orders and Ghyslaine and Isolte were there, it made him happy.

When he heard the rumor that "Isolte might be getting married" from a Royal Guard, it didn't make him all that happy.

When he was guarding a party, Isolte appeared in a dress and looked really pretty. Seeing her in a dress made him happy.

When he saw her dance with some guy he didn't know, it didn't make him very happy.

When he saw some nobles' sons talkin' smack about Isolte behind her back, it didn't make him very happy.

When he saw Isolte walking around with some cool guy it made him sad.

When Isolte--

"That's enough, I get it. I understand everything."

Hans interrupted Doga's story.

He had basically understood.

"So basically, you've fallen for this Isolte."

"..."

Doga's face began to redden.

He didn't know why he ended up telling them, but Hans was exactly right.

“And then, when you heard Isolte was getting married and saw that she was in favour of it, it was a shock to you.”

“Yessir.”

Having it said to him so bluntly, Doga head fell even further.

It seemed that Hans was right again.

“I get it.”

Seeing Doga's reaction, Hans understood.

It really seemed like his brother-in-law had fallen in love.

And at the same time, Hans began to remember his first love.

The only daughter of the greengrocer who lived next-door in his hometown.

There was an age gap of 5 years, but that didn't change the fact that they were childhood friends. She had looked after him since they were little.

She was a kind, reliable, and pretty older sister.

He had liked her since age 5.

He dreamt of marrying her in the future.

When he grew up, he would apply to be a soldier and after his income stabilised, he would propose. Or that was the plan.

When Hans was 12 she married the butcher's son and the two of them succeeded his family business.

Hans knew him and by Hans's judgement, he was already an old man.

Although they were only separated by 5 years, so he really wasn't that old.

At first he didn't believe it.

He was well built, but by no means handsome.

He thought she was against it and would eventually return to him.

But after a year she was curling close to him with a happy smile on her face, and after seeing the large bulge on her stomach, he finally understood. That night, his pillow was wet with tears.

Perhaps, if he had confessed his feeling for her earlier, he wouldn't have had to have felt like that.

But that's not to say he was unhappy right now.

If he had married her, he wouldn't have married Doga's sister.

Doga's sister was both like and unlike him. She was a sweet and confident woman with a small figure.

And the product of their love was now eating Doga's food in his stead.

She was a healthy child.

Hans was confident that he was the happiest man in the world.

But he had that happiness because he had suffered heartbreak.

Because of that experience, the moment he realised he was in love with Doga's sister, he took action.

It may have looked frivolous at first.

But from beginning to end, Hans had been completely sincere with Doga's sister.

And he was that much more serious in his gatekeeping job.

Since the day he confessed, he didn't touch another woman.

And because of that, he had triumphed over his rivals and managed to obtain what he had today.

For that reason, Hans said:

“Go propose to Isolte right now.”

Hearing that, Doga looked up, confused.

“No, you don’t need to propose, being friends is fine. If you can tell her you like her, that’s enough.”

“...”

“If you sit here and do nothing, you’re going to regret it.”

“...But.”

“Don’t think about trying to keep the status quo.

You’re a member of the Asura Kingdom’s famous Golden Knights.

You’re what we garrison members aspire to be.

Raise your head with pride.”

Doga thought for a while.

Doga had no idea how his lineage matched up to Isolte.

But in appearances, Doga knew.

The impeccable beauty, Isolte, didn’t match him.

He had thought a lot about that.

“It’s fine if it doesn’t go anywhere, just tell her and get rejected. At this rate, you won’t even be able to give her marriage your blessing.”

But with Hans’s words, he reached a conclusion.

“Yessir!”

He would confess to Isolte.

Chapter 9

Isolte & Doga – Final Part

Part 1

“How many has it been now?”

Right now, Isolte was in her house connected to the Dojo.
Sitting in the living room opposite her brother.

“...He was the 26th.”

Isolte said that as she hung her head.
Tantris tried to look her in the eyes, but she averted her gaze.

“There’s a rumour going around that you’ve given up.”

“...Yeah.”

“Why?”

Isolte pressed her lips together.

“Well, um... Everybody’s great. They’re all nice, calm people... It’s just...”

“It’s just?”

“Because they’re all so perfect, their flaws all stand out.”

Isolte began to remember all the people she had met with.
The royal family members introduced by Ariel.
They were all lively young men, and did well to entertain Isolte during the meeting.
But... They were all quite honest.

Just as Ariel said, they began to talk about their own individual fetishes.

The five she had met with, were all quite open about it.

Handsome, kind; After they were married, he would try his best to be of use to Isolte: Atole Orpheus Asura.

Handsome, strong; He has a deep understanding of the Water God Style: Beijil Venti Asura
Handsome, elegant; He's be an extreme help to the finances of the Water God Style: Carlos Siodos Asura.

Handsome, funny; He can make you laugh in any conversation: Daniel Lips Asura.

Handsome, cute; He just makes you want to protect him: Elliot Skiron Asura.

All of them spoke in great detail.

About what they'd do to her on the bed, or places other than the bed, what they'd want her to wear, and finally, what Isolte wanted...

Isolte, who was by no means experienced, couldn't keep up.

When she realised, she declined.

They said upfront what they thought.

She remembered the repulsive lust those handsome men possessed.

In truth, Isolte had quite a bit of mistrust towards men.

Not all men are like that.

They may not all be, but the world is large and there would have to be some that are.

So Isolte began to think that it would be fine if she just didn't get married.

"What was wrong with them?"

"I cannot say. It's something that I refuse to let from my mouth."

"I get it... They are Asuran royalty after all."

The perverted tastes of Asuran royalty are quite famous.

The upper class wouldn't be satisfied with the normality of the common person's desires.

“But this really is a problem. You turned them all down.”

“I haven’t rejected all of them yet. There are still some left.”

“True, but at this rate, nothing’s going to get decided.”

Tantris said that and reminisced.

Isolte, whenever she had to choose anything for herself, would always end up being too picky, denying everything, and saying she hated it.

And then someone comes along and takes all the good things leaving her with whatever’s left.

That’s also the reason she missed the usual age for marriage.

“Alright then, let’s do this.”

Taking her personality into account, he came to a decision.

“Marry the next man you meet with.”

“But, that’s...”

“There’s no way he’ll be able to match all your conditions.

Because you’re in a position to choose, you focus on all the bad points.

But after you’re married those flaws could seem like trivial matters.

There might be some massive benefit that you missed at first.”

Tantris didn’t like this kind of overbearing argument.

He believed that ample time to choose is necessary.

And to know that person from the core.

But it’s because of 『Ariel’s introduction』 that he believed, even if he had to be somewhat overbearing, he had to make it work somehow.

He couldn’t allow Ariel’s introduction to end in failure.

“...I understand.”

After a short silence, Isolte prepared herself.

It's true that she was too picky.

She'd always been like that.

That kind of personality has a good affinity with the Water God Style, she would soon be the Water God after all, but it had a bad compatibility with marriage.

If things continued this way, she might spend her whole life single.

Water God is indeed a title to be proud of.

To receive praise and admiration from all.

Responding to everyone with a smile, conversing, and returning home in a good mood.

And then come home to an empty house, eat alone and go to bed with no one by your side.

Empty.

She didn't become the Water God to receive praise.

But besides the swordsman within her, another Isolte exists.

And that existence is already alone.

And because of that, she felt empty.

She didn't know whether or not building a family would fill the hole in her heart.

But it would be better to have someone to come home from being admired to boast to.

It's possible that whoever that might be, after listening to Isolte's day, they might demand some perverse act but...

...No, she was resolved.

"So, when and where is the next meeting?"

"Today. Apparently there'll be a carriage to come pick you up."

"Royalty coming to meet me?"

"Yes."

There were three people left.

Isolte didn't know, but after hearing that five had already been rejected, they had decided to go all out.

As a result of the order being chosen via lottery, each one came at her more serious than the last.

“...Hm?”

It was then that Isolte realised.

“The Dojo is quite noisy.”

The Dojo was adjoined to the Cruel house.

That said, it was the headquarters of the Water God Style, so it took up a sizeable portion of land.

Normally you wouldn't be able to hear anything, but Isolte was a Water Emperor.

When the noise was mixed with anger and bloodthirst, she'd have to notice.

“Is he already here?”

“It seems a bit soon for that... No I might just be mistaken, but in any case, I'm going. Even if it is a mistake, it isn't good to keep royalty waiting.”

“You're right. Let's hurry.”

Isolte and Tantris nodded to each other and walked towards the door.

Part 2

The Dojo was somewhat noisy.

The disciples in their training uniforms were surrounding someone, berating them with insults.

“Aah, Master, there’s someone here to challenge you! He just showed up demanding that our Master come out.”

Isolte and Tantris turned blue the second they heard that.

If the students were acting this way towards royalty, it would be possible for them to have the Dojo shut down.

He probably didn’t give his name.

The man who had come here to pick Isolte up.

“Cease this!”

At Isolte’s cry the place immediately quieted.

“Open the path! He is my guest!”

“...But this man,”

“All students are to kneel in the Dojo!”

After Isolte had shouted that, the disciples scattered like baby spiders, headed towards the Dojo and kneeled in a line.

Ever since the previous generation they’d been quite fast at this.

Well, that aside.

She would have to quickly apologise.

Thinking that, Isolte looked behind where the disciples just were.

“...?”

Waiting there was a man standing at 2 meters tall.

A shoulder width of at least a meter.

With a massive stone like frame.

Isolte recognised it.

“Doga?”

“...Yessir.”

When she called out and he turned around, it was definitely him.

The completely honest member of the Seven Knights of Asura, the 『King’s Gatekeeper』
Doga.

He had previously been standing there looking frightened,
but when he saw Isolte he looked relieved.

“You managed to narrowly escape death. This man is the North Emperor Doga. If he was serious, you people would have...”

Isolte had said that much and then noticed how Doga was dressed.
Knight’s formal wear.

Isolte hadn’t seen him in formal wear before.

He was always wrapped up in his usual gold or grey armour.

And as if it were his uniform, Ariel didn’t say anything.

In addition to his tightly wrapped appearance, he held a bouquet of flowers in his hand.
In Doga’s hand it may have looked small, but it was quite a large bouquet.

“What are you doing here? On Her Majesty’s orders? Or is an urgent summons?”

Isolte was puzzled.

Doga slowly walked towards her and pressed the bouquet towards her hands.

Isolte didn’t think it was possible.

Bouquet and formal wear.

Isolte felt that it wasn't possible.

But what he said next, made the impossible, possible.

“I-Isolte Cruel... I love you! P-Please marry me!”

How was it possible that Doga was a member of the Asura royal family.

She suddenly understood.

He was the only man allowed to guard Ariel's private room.

Luke was a special case and even Sándor, although he was allowed a weapon was assigned to guard some far off room.

Even late at night, he still stands outside Ariel's room.

But considering that, she had never heard that he was a eunuch.

Doga was known to be a harmless man, be he was still a man.

With a large build and strength of a North Emperor.

Considering that, it would be simple for him to take a visit to Ariel's bedroom.

Isolte had always wondered how this man had gotten his position.

But what if he was related to Ariel?

Someone she had known since she was young?

His birthplace was supposedly a small village somewhere in the empire, but there's all kinds of royalty.

Ariel had once fled to a distant country, Doga may have also have hid himself since childhood.

“Isolte.”

At Tantris's call, Isolte came out of her sea of thought.

He may have been part of something dangerous.

Doga was most likely part of the darkness of the Asura Empire.

If she carelessly got involved, Isolte might be erased.

“What’s the matter?”

Being asked from the front brought her back to reality.

“...Nothing.”

Isolte once more looked at Doga.

“Please marry me.”

He said that.

Without a doubt.

He remained silent after that, but she shouldn’t have misheard.

Doga’s manner was impressive.

Walking in from the front door with flowers in hand and proposing right off the bat.

Isolte would have preferred something slightly more romantic.

But if you think about it, you could call that romantic.

Giving flowers in front of a group of people and proposing was added to Isolte’s list of romantic confessions.

Of course, not in front of a smelly Dojo, but a beautiful fountain, at a luxurious party hall...

But she decided to ignore that.

She was ignoring all kinds of things.

“...Perfect timing. A fellow member of the Seven Knights would match you perfectly.”

“Yes... But, it’s just...”

It was then that Isolte realised where they were.

In the line of sight of the Disciples.

“In any case, we should change the location. Doga, please follow me.”

“Yessir.”

Isolte began walking in the opposite direction.

She didn't take the flowers from his hands and for a second Doga looked somewhat sad but immediately began to follow Isolte.

Part 3

And so Doga was invited back to Isolte's estate.

He was sitting huddled up on the sofa that was creaking under his weight.

The bouquet was still on his lap.

Opposite him, Isolte was sitting dignified.

She didn't give off any sort of aura nor did her face reveal her emotions.

It gave the illusion that she was feeling nothing at all.

Tantris wasn't around.

He had left them at the entrance to prepare tea.

“ ... ”

And in the meantime, Isolte was carefully observing Doga's face.

In the face of her gaze, Doga put on a serious expression.

Because he was trembling slightly, it was obvious that he was nervous.

But what Isolte was looking at wasn't that, it was his face.

His simplistic face.

She just wasn't fond of it.

She could try to ignore it, but it just wasn't her preference.

“ ”

Honestly, she thought that maybe one of the previous 5 might have been better.

They were all similarly high spec'd with handsome faces. They were all much more fantastic.

But the next royal family member to come through might be below Doga.

There was also the previous discussion with her brother.

This was something she had to decide.

“In any case, who would have thought you were royalty.”

As Isolte said that with a sigh, Doga looked puzzled.

“I ain’t royalty.”

“...Hm? Were you adopted?”

She asked that to find out if he was hiding his status as royalty.

“I was born in a small village in the Donati province and have always been a gatekeeper. Me pops was a soldier of the village and...”

But what came out from Doga’s mouth was a story of rising up from a decidedly poor soldier.

No, he might not have been poor.

Isolte had already somewhat heard the story but when he got to the part about his sister's wedding, he started crying, which caused Isolte to start crying too.

“And so, after I heard you were gettin’ married, I thought, before that, I should let you know how I felt.”

“ ... ”

But this basically meant that he was someone completely unrelated.

he had nothing to do with the royalty introduced by Ariel.

And so Isolte decided to refuse him.

It was a slight shame, but she had to uphold the dignity imparted through Ariel's introduction of the suitors.

(Hmm? A shame? why?)

It was then she questioned her own thoughts.

But she immediately reached a conclusion.

He was honest, diligent, and wholehearted.

From what she had heard from him just now, he didn't have any kind of fetish that would make you draw away.

He had the strength of a North Emperor and as a member of the Seven Knights his wage was secure.

He liked to drink but it didn't make him violent, nor did he get involved in showy gatherings.

Only his face was no good.

It wasn't that it was bad, it just didn't fit with Isolte's preferences.

"U-um...!"

Seeing Isolte's complex look Doga spoke up as if resolving himself.

"I-I, ever since I first saw you, I thought you were as pretty as a flower, and, um, I had always loved you!"

Doga said that and once more pushed the bouquet towards Isolte.

"Is that right, from when we first met..."

Isolte's vision was filled with flowers.

Deep blue flowers.

She didn't know their name but they were beautiful flowers.

Being compared to these flowers caused her heart to flutter a little.

"...Yessir."

If Isolte recalled correctly, their first meeting was a battle.

To decide the matter of Ariel's guard, the time when she fought Doga.

To say that it was then that it started.

Thinking back, he had always been somewhat kind to her.

He always had faith in her.

He wouldn't take her weapon when she entered Ariel's room.
Of course, it was also because they were both members of the Seven Knights.
But that wasn't all there was to it.

Thinking like that, Doga's face looked about 20% better to her.
It really wasn't that he looked bad.
Looking at it from a different angle he had a certain charm.
You normally wouldn't see it because of his helmet anyway.
Or so, Isolte thought.

"No, no...!"

Isolte shook her head.

"I'm terribly sorry but it has already been decided that I would marry royalty at Ariel's introduction."

Right, if she was to choose Doga here, it would disgrace Ariel.

Isolte was a knight.

Her loyalty may not be absolute and unwavering, but she had still sworn it to Ariel.
To disgrace the name of her Lord is something she mustn't do.

"You are also her majesty's knight, you wouldn't go against her will, would you?"

"...Yessir."

Doga looked somewhat troubled.

Just as Isolte said, Doga was also a Knight.

Doga was Loyal.

It was precisely because he was not royalty that he had gained Ariel's faith and been made gatekeeper.

He could not do anything that might betray Ariel's trust.

"...Then if you would please go home."

"Yessir."

She had thought that Doga would try to resist, but he easily stood up and turned his back to Isolte.

Quite easily.

He even looked somewhat triumphant.

It was as if he knew he would be rejected from the start and was simply relieved that he had said it.

It was a respectable position to take, but it was also somewhat disappointing.

“...Haa.”

Isolte sighed and looked at the table.

There sat a single flower petal.

Not the bouquet;

He had taken that with him.

“I should have at least taken the flowers from him.”

Isolte muttered that to herself with the petal between her fingers.

Later that day she turned down the royal that came to meet her.

Part 4

The next day.

Isolte was in the training grounds.

One of her duties was to be a sword instructor.

While the soldiers were learning from watching the knights, she was thinking about what happened yesterday.

The royal that had come to meet her, Fraiser Kaikias Asura.

His sexual desire was, as usual, repulsive, but he wasn't a dislikable person.

But compared to Doga, his insincerity was readily apparent.

But instead of refusing him outright, she should have at least told him to wait before she made her decision.

In any case, only two were left.

She would have to screen each of them carefully and choose one

As she was thinking that, a messenger soldier approached her from behind.

“Isolte-dono! Her Majesty has issued an urgent summons for you!”

Isolte could guess what Ariel wanted to talk about.

She had probably heard that Isolte had rejected them one after the other and intended to scold her.

She was resigned to her fate.

Isolte thought that she would have to apologise to Ariel.

“Understood.”

Thinking that, Isolte left the training grounds.

She left behind the knights' rooms outside the training grounds in a cloud of dust.

Normally one would shower when leaving after training, but as the summons was urgent, something like that wouldn't be allowed.

And so, she quickly headed towards the King's chambers.

“Hm?”

As she got close to the inner palace, she felt something was off.

She noticed it was much busier than usual.

Normally one would advance through the empty hallway devoid of both soldiers and knights but today you could see soldiers busily walking about.

Something probably happened.

Isolte was thinking about it but Her Majesty's summons was the priority.

Without hearing anything in particular, Isolte headed towards the King's Chambers.

And so, she arrived before the King's Chamber.

In front of the extravagant door, Isolte furrowed her brow.

The person who should have been standing there was missing.

The single man with the stone like frame in his golden armour.

The man who would never move from his post in front of Ariel's room, the Asura Empire's strongest gatekeeper, Doga.

He wasn't anywhere in sight.

As if in his stead, standing in front of the door in formation were the palace knights.

All of whom had weapons strapped to their waists.

It was an imposing sight.

In addition, they all held themselves like experts.

There were also many lower level noble knights that would normally wouldn't be allowed this far into the palace.

They were most likely Sylvester's men.

They did not fear their rear, each taking optimal movement.

“Lord Ifrit!”

It was then she saw the figure of a certain person.

The man in charge of the guard of the castle, the 『King's Rampart』 Sylvester Ifrit.

“Well if it isn't Isolte. You got here quite fast.”

“Just what is going on here?”

Hearing that, Sylvester had quite a difficult face.

As if he was questioning how he should explain it.

Several seconds later, he shrugged his shoulders and said this:

“Her Majesty calls for you.”

As if to say that everything would be explained inside.

Isolte gave up upon hearing that explanation and knocked on the door.

“...Isolte Cruel, reporting in!”

“You may enter.”

Ariel's voice was the same as always.

Contrary to the bustle outside, her voice was unusually calm.

“Please excuse me.”

Isolte opened the door and entered.

What she saw before her was a strange sight.

Ariel sitting at her desk, performing her duties.

Luke standing beside her, arms crossed, looking worn out.

An Imperial Maid standing grim faced and armed.

And Doga.

Doga who was rarely ever seen in Her Majesty's room was standing there.

In one hand he held his golden helmet and in the other, a slightly withered bouquet.

“Good work Isolte. You arrived rather quickly.”

“I was in the training grounds... But just what has happened here?”

To which Ariel replied as if it was nothing:

“Doga has decided to retire as my knight.”

“What!?”

Isolte looked at Doga.

He looked serious.

It didn't seem like he was doing this as a joke.

“So what exactly does this mean.”

“Well then, I'll have you hear it from Doga himself... Doga if you could explain it one more time.”

Ariel said that and looked at Doga.

Doga nodded and began to speak.

“Isolte said that she couldn't marry a knight of Ariel-sama.”

“...!”

A single sentence.

With that, Isolte could guess the reason she was called here.

“That's not it! So as to not shame your Majesty's name: “A knight of her Majesty, you wouldn't go against her will” is all I said.”

“Quiet, listen until the end.”

In response to Ariel's calm voice, Isolte subsided.

But Isolte's thoughts were not calm.

Depending on the flow of the conversation, she could be accused of instigating revolt in Doga.

No, judging by the clamor outside, it wouldn't be strange if that was already the case. Although she didn't have such intentions...

“Doga.”

Unbeknownst to what Isotle was thinking,
In response to Ariel's cue, with some difficulty, Doga continued.

“I thought really hard.
About how I promised my dad that I would protect my sister.
Ariel said that protecting the country and protecting my sister were the same thing.
And Ariel-sama is the queen so protecting her is protecting the country.”

“But my sister said that I had protected her plenty already.
There was nothing to think about, this time I would protect what I loved.”

“I like Ariel-sama. I like this country. I want to protect them.
But my feeling for Isotle are much more special.
So I'll quit as Ariel's knight.
And after that, I'll protect Isotle.”

After he said that, he put his golden helmet back on his head,
And once more he held the flowers out to Isotle.

“ ... ”

Isotle's eyes were filled with slightly withered deep blue flowers.
The same bouquet from yesterday.

“That's what he says... What are you going to do Isotle.”

“Huh?”

Isotle was wide eyed at the sudden confession.

“I dont know what kind of conditions you have put out,
but he has chosen you over the Seven Knights of Asura.
It’s more than a woman deserves. What will you do?”

Those words.

It seemed she wasn’t called he to be reproached for inciting rebellion in Doga.
And on top of that, she was being asked how she would respond to him.

“B-but, the men that your Majesty had introduced...”
“Forget about that group.”

Alarm bells had begun ringing in her heart.
Far greater than when she faced the Fighting God in the Biheiril Empire.
She felt like she would collapse on the spot.
In actual fact, her face was bright red.

“I... I...”

It was then she remembered the story of the first Water God.
The princess that threw everything away to be with the Water God.

With yesterday’s conversation, she knew that Doga didn’t have much to his name.
His strength, large build, and few family members.
And his position as a member of the Seven Knights.
But he no longer even had that much.
He threw away his position and even his own family to choose Isotle.

With yesterday’s conversation, thinking about it carefully, she was somewhat hasty.
Doga said that Isotle was worth more to him than anything.

He was different from all the other nobles and royals she had met with.

Even after he had thrown away that which he held closest to him, he still didn't demand that she become his.

Just like the princess from the story.

In the whole world, the only person who loved her that much, might just be Doga.

Just what was there to be dissatisfied with.

His face was something she no longer cared about.

“ ... ”

Before she realised, Isolte had taken the flowers.

The large blue bouquet.

The slightly withered flowers seemed as if they were Isolte's symbol.

Even if the flowers wilted Doga was still sure to love them.

In the end, a flower's beauty was but a fleeting thing.

“I may not have much, but I'll be in your care from now on.”

“...Yessir.”

Doga had a bright smile on his face while applause burst out from the surroundings.

Part 5

The proposal in the King's Chambers became well known even among ordinary soldiers. Doga's former co-workers shed tears of joy, and those who idolised Isolte and wanted to make her theirs shed tears into their pillows.

Doga retired from his position as a member of the Seven Knights and became Isolte's husband.

He was no longer Doga of the Seven Knights, but Doga the house husband.

"You said that you would retire as my knight but Isolte is also a knight of this country. She is quite strong, but if I were to die, the country would fall into disarray, and she might very well be assassinated.

Of course, you said that you would protect her... Nor do I have any intention of dying.

In any case, how about it? Why don't you protect Isolte while protecting me?"

...But due to Ariel's persuasion it was decided that he would keep his post.

There was no way Ariel would allow the North Emperor Doga to escape from her grasp. Of course, as punishment for the disturbance he had caused in front of the King's Chamber, he was assigned no small amount of manual labour.

Two members of the Seven Knights of Asura getting married was an excellent outcome for Ariel.

The members of the Royal family that she had called out to were but a trivial matter.

Due to his marriage, the time Doga spent guarding the King's Chambers was greatly decreased.

He would return home at a predetermined time each night, and when Isolte was sent away on duty, he would certainly follow.

As a result, Isolte's position shifted to an exclusive guard for Ariel but that's another story.

The awkward Doga had been accepted by Isolte.

Until they were married they spent that time getting to know each other as friends, and it wasn't until about a year later that the two were officially married.

During that time, a rumour started that Isolte truly didn't like Doga after all.

Because within the Royal palace, during that time, Isolte's treatment of Doga was just as cold as usual.

But after Isolte accidentally referred to Doga as 'Darling' in front of the soldiers and turned bright red while quickly correcting herself, that rumour soon vanished.

Surely, when the two were alone, they were as close as a couple could be.¹

And so, the two were married.

[Let's Make an Automaton!]

Chapter 10

The Day The Doll Walked – First Part

Part 1

It was storming that day.

Rain struck the ground as if trying to wash it away, and enormous bolts of lightning fell towards the earth.

The light from these strikes illuminated the inside of a certain house.

A single house, standing in a barren plain.

In that house, two Mad Scientists laughed.

“Hahaha!! MUWAHAHAHAHAH!! FINALLY! IT HAS FINALLY HAPPENED!”

“YES! AFTER ALL THIS TIME! IT’S FINALLY COMPLETE!”

The two Mad Scientists danced around the room hand in hand.

“To have come this far, it’s all due to Shishou’s peerless techniques.”

“No, no. It’s all due to your boundless knowledge and design. Without that we would never have completed it, Zanoba.”

The two were Rudeus and Zanoba.

The two praised each other and stopped dancing.

In the room with the two of them, a dais was set.

It was a stone dais emitting a strange light.

On that dais, a lone girl lay there sleeping completely bare.

“It truly took a long time to make it this far.”

Rudeus thought about all their continuous failures.

The first time they tried to activate it ended in failure.

To complete Prototype Unit No.01 many tens of versions and minor changes were necessary.

As a result, what they got after activation was a golem that could comply with simple commands.

This in itself was something which would be in great demand, but what the two strived for was something much different.

For Prototype Unit No.02 an Artificially Intelligent core and a body closer to a human's were to be developed.

Of course, the failures continued.

The body gradually became more human-like, but to make its movements more human, changing the flesh was very difficult but tampering with the core to the same end could cause it to fail to activate.

To make it as human as possible they had to achieve the perfect balance.

Failures led to more failures.

They re-examined the memoirs of the Eccentric Dragon King Chaos many times over.

They even asked the Armoured Dragon King Pergius for advice and gained insights into magic formations and spirit summoning.

The Dragon God Orsted gave them rare magic stones and knowledge of many materials.

But despite that, the failures continued.

The unreachable domain of the Mad Dragon King. They shed tears at the thought of never touching it.

They failed, shed tears, tried once more, and failed once again.

But each time they failed, they learned something new, slowly making progress.

And finally, one month later.

At last, they had succeeded.

They had succeeded in activating a doll of temporary composition.

The Prototype Unit No.03.

It had no face but without a doubt, it activated.

They were overjoyed at the success.

After taking the Data from the Prototype Unit No.03 they immediately began work on the next unit.

The Prototype Unit No.04

The Prototype Unit No.04 had specs quite close to the finished product.

The body and face of a human, lips that moved when it talked and it made full use of its limbs to move freely.

But in actual fact, the two of them hadn't completed all the experiments on the Prototype Unit No.03.

They hadn't examined for all possible flaws.

In their pursuit of their ideal doll and perfect form, they did not have the patience.

And so, they brushed the process aside and began work on the almost complete Prototype Unit No.04.

But that in itself was a good thing.

Everything Prototype Unit No.03 could do Prototype Unit No.04 could too.

They still had to perform the system check on the Prototype Unit No.04 and test its compatibility with the tasks that they would have the finished product undergo.

That was fine, they thought.

This is the next step, they thought.

What we want to see it beyond this, they thought.

This is the Automaton that we want to see, they thought.

“Now then! I'm activating it~!”

“Yeah!”

Zanoba reached out to the magic stone on the girl's modest chest with an excited expression.

Within that magic stone, in the chest of the girl was the core.
The tiny complicated magic formation in the Core was the girl's heart.

After the Core activates, the Doll would stand on its own feet, learn, make its own decisions, and absorb mana with its own power allowing for semi-permanent activity.
It was perfect autonomous doll.

Of course if that happens it's possible that it could collapse from mana exhaustion.
But if that happens it would just need to be rested on the platform until all its magic recovered.

But when Rudeus first proposed that, Zanoba had said:
"If it needs a human to restart it, doesn't that make it incomplete?"

But Rudeus replied to him:
"Of course not, that in itself is perfection.
When people fall and can't get up by themselves, it's by borrowing the hands of others that they can stand once more."

"..."

Zanoba's hand began to hesitate.
Would even he hesitate at having to touch the chest of a small girl?
No, he wasn't someone to have doubts over something like that.

"...Shishou why don't you do it?"
"No, the reason we made it this far was your hard work, you do it."

Zanoba was frightened.
They were about to realise their ideal.
The thing they had been dreaming about for more than 10 years.
But he wasn't originally a timid man.
He was someone unrelated to indecision.

“I understand... Then, I will activate it!”

“Yeah!”

Zanoba’s hand slowly reached towards the girl’s chest.

Slowly and carefully as if touching something fragile his hand crept along the girl’s skin towards the magic stone.

The mana needed for activation wasn’t that large.

It was an amount anyone could provide.

“... 『Awaken, my beloved daughter』 ”

The moment Zanoba said the activation incantation, his mana was sucked through his finger.

The red light on the platform began to turn blue.

the second he confirmed that, he removed his hand.

“ ... ”

Several seconds passed in silence.

The two men held their breath and watched the girl activate.

The post activation process was automatic.

After the chant and input of the initial mana, all that was left to do was watch.

“ ... ”

The girl, silently opened her eyes.

She had dark black pupils.

And at the same time, the physical connection to the platform was severed.

After the connection was severed, the girl slowly sat up.

She had pure white hair.

She was so slender, you would think she didn’t have the slightest trace of muscle.

Her breasts were small but the shape was perfect and her figure was so beautiful you wouldn't think it belonged to a young girl.

This was the crystallisation of Zanoba and Rudeus's many years of experience in doll creation and art.

Her body was made of artificial flesh and her bones were of the same strength as the Magic Armour.

The artificial flesh used Rudeus's earth magic clay as a base, mixed with the scales of Red Dragons and Phantom Butterflies that have high magic power and finally, the sap of an Elder Treant and Immortal Race blood.

This was the compound that was completed after continuous trial and error with high class materials. While possessing exceptional durability, it also had a feel extremely close to human skin.

What made the body move were magic formations carved into the bones.

These formations cause the artificial flesh to solidify and move like muscle.

The principle was the same as the Magic Armour.

But the joints were made from the powdered bone of Skeleton Deathbreakers.

The bone powder raised the magical conductivity.

Especially high rank skeletons have exceptional conductivity allowing extremely human-like movements.

The girl raised her hands stretched above her head and stretched backwards.

Her expression was human and her movements smooth.

Her overly calm actions that emphasised her chest were brimming with feminine charm.

Gulp

Rudeus swallowed.

"I didn't notice it when we were making it, but those movements are much more dangerous than I realised."

"..."

Zanoba didn't respond.

But you could see on his face that he felt the same.

The girl, still silent, lay back down and raised her knees.

Her young buttocks came up with her knees and she then began to extend them and with her feet still in the air she began to open and close her thighs.¹

The secret place of the doll was exposed in front of the two.

Coincidentally, these movements were not to flaunt her body in an erotic sense.

Upon activation a self check program of joint movement would be initiated.

If the check ended in failure, it would give an error message.

From her own mouth.

“Activation successful.”

Finally, after removing her hair from in front of her face, she proclaimed that it was complete.

The artificial voice was very similar to someone the two knew.

“Haa...”

The two, releasing their tense expressions, breathed a sigh of relief.

They had failed countless times at this step.

Like the time when she raised her arms and her hands flew towards the ceiling like a rocket punch, or when her hip bent at a weird angle, or when her crotch split and it looked like some odd work of art, or when both hands started spinning...

And among the Prototype unit No.03 some simply exploded.

The problem was that the skeleton was the same as the magic armour.

When he had first boarded the Magic Armour, Rudeus had to learn to control its strength.

But that required a large amount of experience in both magic and bodily control.

But a doll has no experience.

And in that case, if it was always using maximum strength it would destroy itself.
Therefore it was necessary to install all kinds of limiters.

But it was still made to the same standard as the Magic armour.
Even with a limiter, the threshold is still high and movement on the level of a Saint Class swordsman is possible.

“It seems like there’s no problems.”
“Yeah.”

As if reacting to their conversation, still lying down, the doll looked at Zanoba with its glassy, inorganic eyes.
And then it spoke.

“Master, what is your name?”
“It’s Zanoba!”
“Master Zanoba registered. What are your orders?”
“Please register this man as Sub-Master.”
“Understood. What is your name?”
“It’s Rudeus.”
“Sub-Master Rudeus registered. What are your orders?”

This exchange was something they had repeated countless times with the Prototype Unit No.03.
To first register the Master.

“Well then, if you would please get up off the table and stand on the floor.”

The doll got off the table and quickly stood up.
Seeing this, Rudeus clenched his fists.

“Alright, it can properly register Master’s names and follow commands.”

Rudeus was extremely excited looking at the doll.

The first time around, they had experienced major issues.

When he had said “It’s Zanoba” the doll had registered “Master It’s Zanoba”

Or another time when it didn’t move at all not understanding that “If you would please” was the beginning of a command.

They had gotten advice from Pergius to deal with it.

The hint that they had gotten led to all kinds of changes to the magic formation and they had restarted from square one a number of times.

And that’s how they had ended up here.

The completed summoning magic formation that was carved into the Core contained all human instinctual responses.

“Jump up and down lightly.”

“Yes Master.”

The doll began jumping up and down with both feet.

Quite a powerful jump.

The artificial flesh had enough power to destroy the skeleton but it seemed like the proper amount of control was in place.

“Keep jumping and raise both hands above your head.”

“Yes Master.”

“Spread your feet apart and... Stop.”

“Yes Master.”

“Now start jumping again while spinning both hands around.”

“Yes Master.”

“Now each time you jump, alternate between opening and closing your legs.”

“Yes Master.”

The doll moves exactly as Zanoba says.

Her hair bounced around her swinging arms.

The balance was also perfect.

“Now make a funny face.”

The doll stopped for a second at Zanoba's abrupt command.

"Yes Master."

She hit her cheeks with her hands and her face warped.

From expressionless to odd.

You might not be able to call it funny.

But the doll thought for itself and reached a conclusion.

In other words, exactly what they wanted.

"Hmm, it seems promising."

"Yeah..."

But Rudeus was frowning.

What he was looking at was her small chest that would occasionally shake and her exquisitely designed nether regions.

I say this for the sake of Rudeus's honour, but it was not a sexual gaze.

It was something he made himself after all.

But each time it got more complete, he was afraid.

Was it his own talent?

No.

"But it really is similar... The face, and while it might have been an accident, the voice too."

Then Rudeus looked at the doll's face.

The doll looked Rudeus in the eye but it didn't smile.

They had made it to be able to smile, but it probably wouldn't without an order.

But that wasn't Rudeus's problem.

"This is definitely going to make her mad..."

The doll's face resembled someone they knew.

“You mean Nanahoshi?”

Yes, Nanahoshi Shizuka.

Their otherworlder friend sleeping in the sky castle.

The doll resembled her.

Her face, her different length black hair, her figure, and height all resembled Nanahoshi.

A naked doll that resembled their friend.

With sensual breasts and functioning genitals.

“Idiot, I’m talking about Sylphy!”

Right, what he feared was his wife’s anger.

“You could tell her that you needed someone to take over for Nanahoshi-dono while she sleeps?”

“Maybe.”

Right, they had a reason.

In the case that they find Nanahoshi’s friend that was transferred with her.

Although they could simply tell him her name, it would be better to hear it from someone who resembled Nanahoshi.

They had that reason so they made the doll to resemble Nanahoshi.

“The women of your house should also be aware.”

“They know we’re making an automaton but they don’t know that it looks like Nanahoshi.”

That said, Rudeus didn’t think that making a doll that looked like Nanahoshi would make his wives mad.

They had a proper reason and Nanahoshi herself was also fine with it.

If he explained it properly they’d probably accept it.

“The problem is the chest and crotch.”

But explaining the fact that a doll of his friend functioned sexually was a different problem. Thinking that his wives might find out, Rudeus was anxious. Based on the way he explained it his bed could end up very cold. Sylphy would end up looking offended and say “Since you went to all the trouble to make it, why don't you just sleep with the doll instead?”, or she might just burst into tears and get depressed. Either way, it wasn't a good thing for Rudeus.

“It wasn't necessary to make it this elaborate.”
“You can't say that, with Shishou's masterful techniques you have crafted a magnificent shape. Especially the nipples, they're quite erotic.”
“Idiot, after I purposely went out of my way to be vague don't go saying nipple.”
“I apologise.”

Why had they made the chest and crotch so elaborate.
True, when they were designing the project, they had an ideal.
The ideal of a Dutch wife.²

But at this point they had separated from that ideal.
They should have held themselves back.
It wasn't necessary to make the chest and crotch 18+. It didn't need nipples to make tea..

In the first place, this was merely the Prototype Unit No.04.
There was no reason to make the prototype look like Nanahoshi.
Rudeus got ahead of himself.

“In any case, let's keep this a secret from Sylphy and the others.
“Shishou is whipped after all.”
“Please at least call me devoted.”

Currently there weren't many who knew that the doll looked like Nanahoshi.
Orsted, Pergius, and Nanahoshi herself.

Of course, they planned on unveiling it after completion and informing various people. They had plans to mass-produce them after all.

But if those people involved knew how detailed they had made it, they would probably give them a cold stare.

Roxy might just look at him softly and ask “That doll has a better figure than me doesn’t it?”, or maybe just draw away from him with a melancholic look.

Having Roxy draw away from him would leave Rudeus with no other option besides Seppuku.

“Hmm, I can't think that your wives would be as upset as you believe. Everyone is quite aware of how energetic you are.”

“If we were making a normal one I’d think so too, but it’s just because it looks like Nanahoshi I can't help but feel trouble coming.”

Rudeus, while nodding to himself, poked the doll’s chest.

It was a slightly different sensation to that of a human but it was still extremely soft.

If he hadn’t made it himself, he would get quite excited.

That excitement might be considered cheating.

If Eris found Rudeus cheating she would probably give a “Hmph” with her mouth in the shape of a \sim and after removing the fist she lodged in his nether regions, push him down and climb on.

To make sure he would never cheat again, she would completely make Rudeus her’s.

Although, this wouldn’t necessarily be something Rudeus would hate.

“...”

Incidentally, the doll had carefully watched the finger that poked it, but hadn’t given any other reaction.

It was simply the sensation of being touched.

They hadn’t inputted the sensation of sexual pleasure.

If Elinalise or Ariel had been more deeply involved in the production process, it might have turned out that way, but the two were currently engrossed in child rearing.

“Well then, shall we scrap it now?”

As he said that, his face darkened.

To Zanoba, scrapping a doll was not something enjoyable.

No matter the doll.

“...No! This one in itself is complete to a certain degree. Scrapping it would be a waste.”

Rudeus folded his arms and began to think.

Worst case scenario, they would scrap this one and begin work on the next model.

Exchanging just the crotch and chest would be impossible with their current technology, They would need to think about it for the mass production model, but currently it was a unique item.

“We need to think about what to do in case someone finds out...”

“Nobody will know. Isn’t that why we’re doing our research all the way out here.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

They were currently in the Fittoa region of the Asura Empire.

They had borrowed a section of land in the Fittoa restoration zone from the Boreas house and built a research lab.

There weren’t many who knew its location

“It doesn’t matter to you. If we get found out, no one’s going to get very mad at you.”

“No, I told you about it before, but recently, Julie has been getting angry at me.”

“Ahh, right, that’s true.”

Even Julie who was supposedly working on the project with them didn’t know about the lab.

She had helped out with the artificial flesh and the skeleton but she didn’t know how they were being used.

She was cut off.

That is to say, lately, whenever Zanoba brings back any kind of erotic doll, Julie would get obviously displeased.

Although she wouldn't go as far as to destroy them, there were times when she would move them out of sight.

There was no helping it.

Although she had long since grown up, age wise she was at that time... Adolescence.

The two knew that a growing girl had a rather fragile spirit.

“But isn't it possible that Julie could find the transfer magic formation in the basement.”

The magic formation leading to the lab was in the basement of Zanoba's workshop.

If Julie were to go into the basement, stumble on the magic circle and decide to activate it out of curiosity...

She would witness the naked automaton girl.

It would probably be rather shocking.

“I made sure to lock the door from behind and I have the only key.”

“Julie could easily get past that. I taught her how to open locks with earth magic after all.”

“No, Julie wouldn't open a door I locked myself. She has promised that.”

“Good.”

Julie and Zanoba were still master and servant after all.

Julie understood that there was a line she shouldn't cross.

“Let's get back on track. What should we do about this?”

Rudeus again began to fold his arms and think.

Thinking about it, besides the nipples and crotch, the rest was all fine.

And besides, this was the Prototype Unit No.04. If they were to dispose of it, taking all its data wouldn't take too long.

“Alright, although it's a waste, let's take the data from it and scrap it.”

Rudeus reached a conclusion.

Ruseus had decided to go through it but Zanoba was still hesitant.

It had taken quite a large amount of time and money to make and they still hadn't completed the experiments that they had to do on the Prototype Unit No.03

Destroying it just because the nipples were erotic was too much of a waste.

It was then, a light bulb suddenly popped above Zanoba's head.

"Wait, Shihou!"

"What?"

"We can just put clothes on it!"

"Hm? Hah! Right! We can just do that!"

At Zanoba's suggestion, Rudeus also realised.

As long as no one can see it, there's no problem.

With clothes on, the erotic parts would be hidden.

As long as they weren't a rapist, no one would suddenly tear off its clothes.

Meaning that as long as they didn't tell anyone it would be fine.

"Alright, wait here a minute."

Rudeus said that and rushed into the next room.

There were the clothes he had prepared in advance.

A thick beige dress, the kind you wouldn't see often in the Magic City Sharia.

And also a bra and panties.

Of course, brand new.

They had originally planned to clothe the doll.

The two had completely forgotten about it and simply trembled at the frightening seductive power of the naked girl.

"Alright, put on these clothes."

"Yes Master."

"After that, lie back down on the platform."

"Yes Master."

After the doll put on the clothes Rudeus gave it, it went and lay back down on the dias. For the time being, now that it had clothes on, the dangerous sexual aura had disappeared.

It was now simply a girl who looked like Nanahoshi lying still.

There was no immorality at all.

Although the fact that it didn't blink was somewhat unnerving...

But like this, it seemed like all their problems had been solved.

"I'm kind of tired now. It's a bit early but let's leave it at this for tonight."

"Sure."

After deciding what to do next, Rudeus sat down.

They didn't end up conducting extensive experiments but the outcome looked good.

There was no need to rush, they could teach it all kinds of things tomorrow.

Rudeus clapped his hands together and stood up.

"Tonight we celebrate! Our plan has taken a great step forward."

"Of course! Since I thought you would say that, I had planned something in advance. Over here!"

Zanoba picked up a barrel that was sitting in the corner of the room.

After carrying it to the middle of the room he broke the top open with his fist.

It gave off a large bang and a little spilled out.

"Well aren't you well prepared!"

Zanoba grabbed cups he had also put together and scooped some out from the barrel.

The cup was filled a translucent violet liquid.

It was the wine of the Asura Empire.

"Oh, do we have anything to eat?"

“All we have is preserved stuff.”

“That’ll do.”

After collecting a mountain food from the cellar, the two began filling their cups. They raised their cups into the air in a toast.

“To the advancement of the doll project!”

“To our dream!”

“Cheers!”

And the merrymaking began.

Part 2

“But still, what should we teach it?”

“Since we’ve already confirmed that it can complete simple tasks, we should see just how adaptable it is and test the extent of its independent thought.”

“There’s a whole heap of things to look into. Let’s just get through whatever we can.”

The two were discussing their future plans while drinking.

After it had successfully activated they didn’t make it do anything considerable.

But it did manage to skillfully interpret a vague order

She had the fundamental knowledge of the earlier models and would continue learning by herself.

But they still didn’t know just how far it’s intellect would stretch.

Like the extent of what it could learn or things it couldn’t do.

Or how far it could think for itself and make it’s own decisions.

“Leave it to me. I’ll take responsibility and teach it all kinds of things.”

“Don’t go teaching it anything you shouldn’t.”

“I would return those words right back at you.”

“That’s rich coming from you.”

“Hahahahaha.”

The two were drinking merrily and thinking about what to do next.

But then Zanoba changed the conversation topic.

“Right, the 『byproducts』 that you made have been selling well too.”

“We did end up making all kinds of other things in the middle of research. Have you been selling them at the store?”

“The frog bag is particularly popular.”

“Oh really...”

To get the proper consistency of human skin, Rudeus tried all different kinds of combinations.

Among them was the cheek pouch of the Rain Force Frog. It was extremely long and thin but also very durable.

He had originally thought to use that to make the skin.

In the end they decided to look for something different to use and made something else from it.

That was...

“The ^{Condom} contraceptive³ is it.”

“Luke-dono is especially pleased with it. He created a factory to produce them in Asura.”

“Asuran nobles really do like that kind of thing...”

“Although you say that, you use it too don't you?”

“Well yeah.”

Yes, Rudeus used them too.

Almost every night.

After his third and fourth daughters Lily and Christina were born there was a silent agreement that the next child to be born would be Sylphy's.

Sylphy became the centre, so the nights he spent with Eris and Roxy decreased.

But because the Elves weren't very fertile, she wasn't able to conceive a third time.

The fact that Sieg and Lucy were able to be born might simply have been good timing or maybe god was bullying them...

They didn't know, but when their turns began to decrease Eris and Roxy got restless.

Compared to before, Eris's desire had settled down but she was still quite lascivious.

The gleam in her eyes was like a wild beast.

But if Rudeus would accompany her, she might end up pregnant.

And that's where the condom comes in.

If it was used, the wild Eris could be satisfied and there would be no child.

Seeing Eris who was currently bearing her third child, Sylphy didn't look upset, nor was the atmosphere of the house strained.

It was somewhat of a godsend.

“...Well, you know, it's not too good for the amount of children to increase if the number of people to look after them doesn't as well.”

“You could just employ a maid.”

“If I hired a maid, she wouldn't look after me too. Six people is just too many.”

“Hahaha... That's just like you Shishou.”

Zanoba laughed.

Seeing that Rudeus suddenly thought of something.

The question everyone was always thinking of asking.

“Right, what do you think of Julie?”

“In what way?”

“Like, as a second wife?”

“With Julie?”

“Well there is her age, and her status is quite low... But you don't consider yourself royalty anymore right? It's not a bad idea right? Being surrounded by kids, praising them, sometimes having to scold them.”

Zanoba listened and then firmly shook his head.

“I won't get married to her.”

“...Right.”

Hearing his firm reply Rudeus decided to let it go.

Everybody had a line that couldn't be crossed.

It didn't seem like he was saying that simply because he didn't want to marry her.

There were plenty of reasons like his status as royalty, the fact that he was already married or the younger brother that he had killed, or Pax.

“It's nothing major. Would you like to hear it?”

“If you’re willing to tell.”

“I’m a Miko and in exchange for my super human strength, my skin doesn’t have much feeling.”

“Meaning?”

“The inside of a woman is too soft, there is not enough stimulation.”

Hearing that Rudeus was shocked.

It was a juicy story.

But he also understood.

Like the reason why Zanoba would use bronze for statues whenever he could.

“Of course, that’s not the only reason.

There’s also other things like Pax and Julius.

But the fact that it would cause my partner pain to be able to produce children is the main reason.”

“I see... But still, if the opportunity comes, you should ask Julie about it. It’s fine if you don’t have kids... There’s also the option of adoption after all.”

Rudeus was so vague because he already had six children himself.

“Haha, I guess you’re right.”

Hearing Zanoba’s feeble laugh Rudeus decided that he should stay away from marriage and changed the topic.

Now was the time to celebrate.

They should be happily drinking.

“Let’s leave the rubber aside! What about the others? Are they selling?”

“The others are doing alright. They’re being treated like oddities, some of them have made it into eccentric’s collections.”

“I thought they were pretty convenient... Aisha was super happy about the vacuum cleaner.”

Rudeus’s byproducts were quite diverse.

Using magic formations to make all kinds of things like a fan or vacuum, waterproofing or a fridge.

Rudeus's inventions were quite convenient but not many were widespread.

Mostly because although the magic wasn't too hard to reproduce, the materials involved inflated the cost.

It's possible that further research could lower the prices but that was in a different direction to their goal.

"They are convenient, but Asura and Millis both have magic tools to the same effect, so simply hiring a servant to operate them is easier."

"I was thinking more about decreasing the servants work though"

Rudeus took a swig and sighed.

Even though Rudeus had lived happily here for years he still couldn't forget the sensations of his past life.

"Well as long as the technology remains, it's always possible that one day, someone else will put it to use so let's at least leave behind how we made it."

"Yeah, that sounds good. I'm sure that some time in the future, someone will succeed your will Shishou. They might think you've written some kind of phantom scripture."

"I will name it 'The Rudeus Anthology'"

"Haha, future magicians would never even dream that the grimoire written by the man called the Right Hand of the Dragon God would contain household appliances."

The two were conversing and drinking happily.

Their faces slowly got red.

A whole barrel was a bit much for the two of them.

"It's a shame that Cliff and Lord Badi aren't here."

"...Cliff-dono definitely wouldn't approve of such an immoral doll."

"Let's call him after the next step. We could even have the toast at Cliff's house in Millis."

"Let us do that! Ohh, of course! After we put the finishing touches on this prototype, let us present the Automaton Model No.01 to Cliff-dono."

“That sounds great! Ah, but if we do that, the girl type would be a bad idea... let’s make it a boy.”

“A boy would also be a good thing.”

“Oh, has this sparked his Majesty Zanoba’s curiosity?”

“I have no interest in homosexuality, I simply understand the merits of a doll in the shape of a young boy. Do you not Shihou?”

“I get it. Even if Sylphy was a boy, I’d still get it.”

“Hahaha, that’s just like you Shishou!”

As their celebration began to liven up, the two also got quite drunk on their everlasting liquor.

And because the two old friends were engrossed in their drinks and research....

“Alright, the next one will be a boy model. Let’s try our best to make a young boy good looking enough to make cliff jealous.”

“Haha, Ahahahah!”

...The two didn’t notice.

That their festivities were being closely watched.

And that the contents of their merry conversation was being listened to.

That person was sneering in laughter.

Part 3

“Uugh... My head hurts.”

The next day.

Rudeus began to detox the pain in his head and got up.

Looking outside the window, the storm had blown over and a cloudless sky opened up before him.

“It’s already noon... I must have drank too much.”

But, for some reason, drinking together as men was too good.

Celebratory drinks especially.

Yesterday they were bewildered at the dolls shamelessness, but that was another thing.

Now that the Prototype was complete, the next step would be the fun part.

The dream before them. Their overflowing hope. Their bursting love.

Thinking those kinds of things, Rudeus looked towards the doll’s face and...

“...Wha?”

It wasn’t there.

The doll wasn’t on the dais.

All he could see was an empty platform.

“Wait a second, huh? What? Umm, Zanoba~? What’d you do with the doll~?”

Zanoba had probably woken up before him and gone to teach it.

Thinking that, he began to look around.

He then saw wrapped in a blanket in the corner of the room, Zanoba just waking up.

“Hmm~... Shishou, the doll is still suspended on the dais isn't it.”

“Suspended?”

Rudeus suddenly remembered.

After they had put clothes on it they had definitely put it to sleep on the dais.

There was no doubt that they had put it asleep.

“.....Did we suspend it?”

But to properly suspend it, it was necessary to give it the order to shut down.

You had to place your hand on the magic stone and recite the chant.

They hadn't done that.

“S-Search!”

“U-Understood!”

The two began to search for the doll in a panic.

But they couldn't find it anywhere.

Not in the lab or anywhere else.

The doll had disappeared.

Chapter 11

The Day The Doll Walked – Second Part

Part 1

That day, Elinalise was out shopping.

Hand in hand with her son Clive.

Elinalise had already birthed and raised many children but holding hands and going out with her own child was still fun.

Especially with Clive who looked so similar to his father.

His hair and his lips both resembled Cliff.

And although she had no basis, the way he thought himself the best was exactly like him too.

Remembering how Cliff had looked when they had first met, Elinalise began to drool...

Ahem smile happily.

"Okaa-san, pumpkin! Buy the pumpkin! The pumpkin!"

"Hmm, you're right. Pumpkin is quite delicious this season..."

"Not like that! If you eat pumpkin you know, you grow taller!"

"Who taught you that?"

"Lucy-chan!"

Elinalise's son Clive was a pretty boy.

Especially his eyes and features were quite like Elinalise, there was no doubt that he'd be popular with both human and elf girls in the future.

But unfortunately he got his stature from his father and was quite short.

Clive had quite a complex about it and at home he would talk about how he wanted to get taller all the time.

"I wonder why you want to get taller so much?"

"It's a secret!"

Clive's face got a little red as he said that.

But Elinalise already knew the reason.

It was Lucy.

Clive was in love with Lucy who was two years his senior.

He wanted to get taller so that Lucy would think he was cool.

"Hmm?"

It was then that Elinalise's long ears picked up a familiar voice.

(Oioi, Isn't it common sense when you get something from someone to give something back huh?)

(I wanna know what kinda voice you'll make for us girlie.)

The voice was coming from a back alley behind a bar.

Looking into it, you could see a girl being held by two men.

They were someone Elinalise recognised.

And for a change, this time it was the girl that she knew.

"By voice do you mean like this?"

"You'd think so right? But people can make a much better sound you know?"

"Come on, come to the inn with us and let's have a listen? It's cool right? Let's go."

The woman didn't seem like she was completely against it.

But as far as Elinalise knew, she wasn't that fond of this kind of invitation.

What she wasn't showing on her face is that she was troubled.

"Hey, cut it out."

Elinalise, shopping bag still in hand called out to them.

The men immediately turned to look.

"Huh? What's your problem?"

"That girl is a friend of Rudeus. Go find someone else to hit on."

The two men turned their lustful eyes towards Elinalise.

"By someone else... Missie, how about you?"

"Eeh, to say that in front of my little brother? How dirty."

"Your brother? You flatter yourself."

Elinalise had an embarrassed smile and a hand on her face.

From their joking attitude she could already tell they were outsiders.

Most likely traveling adventures.

If they were from around here, there's no way they would still be here after hearing Rudeus's name.

"Who are you... Hmm?"

In front of her appeared Clive red in the face.

With a tree branch he had picked up in hand.

"Dont touch my mother!"

"Clive, I appreciate the thought, but you mother can handle people of this level no problem. Get back."

"Waaa..."

Elinalise lifted Clive up and placed him behind her back.

Elinalise reminded herself to praise Clive later and drew her sword.

"This level? Even though the two of us are A rank?"

"Hmm... Impressive at that age, you two must have some amount of talent."

"Haha, you sure are composed. You must have some confidence in your skills."

"No, unfortunately I'm simply mediocre."

The two men drew their swords.

They looked very familiar with them.

Elinalise carried her sword around for self defence, but unfortunately she didn't have her shield.

Considering the opponent's strength, 2 vs 1 was not in her favour.

"Rest assured, after I teach you a lesson, I'll show you a good time."

Elinalise returned her sword to its sheath.

The two had looked somewhat scared before, but now they were looking towards Elinalise with lustful eyes.

After seeing the two separate from the girl, Elinalise took a deep breath.

"KYAAAAA! HELP!! KIDNAPPERS!!! AAAHH!"

A scream echoed through the alley.

The loud noise startled the two.

"Wha!"

"W-we aren't kidnappers...!"

But Elinalise's voice continued ring out.

Once Elinalise could see that no one was coming from the empty path, the back alley fell silent.

"...Heh, trying to give us a fright. There's no way anybody would be coming. We're behind a bar in the middle of the day."

"I'll let you scream as much as you like on the bed..."

But then.

Doors all around began to open one after the other.

And out came men.

Groups of wild men, all in jet black coats.

On their backs was a yellow crest that somewhat resembled a tiger.

They were the Rudo Mercenary corp.

As part of their work, they helped carry in the alcohol that the bars planned to sell that night.

"Elinalise Anego!"¹

"Who the hell do you bastards think you're laying your hands on!"

"You assholes pickin' a fight with the Rudo Mercenaries!?"

"You wanna go! We'll take you!"

Those normally courteous young men who would protect the peace, when dealing with outlaws or those that hurt others, would become quite ill mannered.

And on top of that, there were more than 10 people heading towards them.

If it was Rudeus he would have apologised the second he saw them trying to intimidate him.

No, Rudeus would probably have apologised the second he saw the doors open.

".....W-We apologise!"

"We were ignorant of your greatness... We have only arrived today."

It took longer than two seconds for the men to throw away their swords and apologise.

Congratulations, Rudeus's honour has been upheld.

Rudeus isn't a coward or a chicken after all.

Yes, if a large number of wild men come out of a building, anyone would apologise.

"Anego, what should we do?"

"They haven't done anything yet, so let's let them off with a warning. Take them somewhere nearby and teach them a lesson."

"Yes ma'am! Alright then, you lot, come over here!"

"No, but we... um..."

"I said get over here!"

"Umm, I have somewhere I have to be..."

"You can afford to miss it!"

After confirming that the adventurers had been dragged into the bar, Elinalise walked up to the girl.

"Nanahoshi, it's been a while... Was it already the day you were supposed to wake?"

The girl was Nanahoshi.

The expressionless girl nodded.

"I awoke last night."

"Is that so... Well talking here would be dull. Let's hurry on."

Elinalise said that and took Nanahoshi's hand.

It was then she felt something was off.

"Oh, Nanahoshi, when did you cut your hair?"

As far as Elinalise could remember, Nanahoshi had long hair.

But now it was cut to around the nape of her neck.

Elinalise was puzzled.

The girl called Nanahoshi pursed her lips and smiled.

It was a somewhat distorted smile.

It was a troubled smile, as if hiding something hard to say, or perhaps plotting something...

Seeing that, Elinalise, with her wealth of experience, guessed something.

"There seems to be some reason... If you're fine with me, I wouldn't mind listening. Are you free?"

"I currently have no important tasks."

"Well then, how about we head to that cafe?"

Elinalise took the hand of a slightly sullen Clive and picked up her shopping.

"Clive? Oh, what are you so annoyed about? What? Are you sad you couldn't protect your mother? Go tell that to the girl you like, not your mother... Nanahoshi, what do you want to do? Are you coming along?"

And as told, Nanahoshi followed her to the Cafe.

Part 2

"In any case, that was rather dangerous. I'm glad it was behind that bar so that help could come quickly."

A few minutes ago, the two had entered the cafe.

They had ordered the same fruit juice.

Nanahoshi had imitated Elinalise's order.

Incidentally, in front of Clive was a somewhat fancy dessert.

Lately sugar had been appearing rather cheap on the market so people had been using it to make preserved fruits.

It seemed to be Nanahoshi's first time in the cafe as she was looking rather curiously.

"So, what happened?"

"There have been numerous occurrences, it is difficult to choose a single one. Please refine the question."

"...Did you always talk like that?"

Elinalise was puzzled, but she knew that going through hard times could often change the way people speak.

If a person changes so does their outlook.

"Then please tell me everything from the beginning."

"From the beginning?"

"Yes, from the very start."

Nanahoshi blinked twice and began talking.

"I awoke on the dais. When I awoke Zanoba-sama and Rudeus-sama came up to me."

"Oh, intruding on a lady's room, what am I to do with those two."

"The two of them, seeing me without clothes, looked exceedingly happy."

"Huh...?"

"After that the two of them touched my limbs and exposed chest, proceeding to check every corner of my body. After that they began to argue whether or not they would use me. After they were satisfied with me, they came to the conclusion to dispose of me and proceeded to put me to sleep on the dais and then proceeded to sleep themselves."

Elinalise's thoughts stopped for a moment.

The image she had in her head was of Rudeus and Zanoba stripping a sleeping Nanahoshi with vulgar looks on their faces, waking her up and forcing themselves onto her.

Having seen those kinds of men plenty of times, Elinalise could imagine it quite easily.

"A-and you didn't resist?"

"Resistance was meaningless."

"True, they are Rudeus and Zanoba... Was Pergius-sama not present?"

"It was only the two of them."

Elinalise didn't know much about Pergius's personality.

But she did know that Pergius wasn't in his castle all the time.

"W-was this the first time?"

"Yes. But Rudeus-sama and Zanoba-sama had planned this for some time, it seemed like they had preparations in place"

"Are you saying it's possible they have been aiming for you since way back?"

For them it would be simple to know when Pergius would be out.

And by extension, when such a day would line up with when Nanahoshi would awake.

"..."

Elinalise was a calm woman.

She was a woman who, due to her vast experiences, had the composure to remain calm in a situation such as this.

But to her, being betrayed by those she trusted was quite shaking.

But how could Rudeus...

Putting aside the unpopular Zanoba,

Rudeus was surrounded by his children and wives who both loved him and he loved back.

The man who put his life on the line and fought Orsted for the sake of his family.

Rudeus who does all kinds of things with Sylphy and Roxy at night.

Rudeus who had Eris do all kinds of things to him at night.

How could he... To Nanahoshi...

She who was frantically searching for a way to return to her homeland.

There was a part of her that thought that it was impossible.

That it was some kind of mistake.

Rudeus had been sincerely helping her.

Much to Sylphy's jealousy he continued to help Nanahoshi.

He went to the Magic Continent and fought the Demon Lord Atofe to save her.

But just looking at Nanahoshi's expression.

Removing the uneasy smile from before, she was constantly completely expressionless, like a doll.

She neither smiled nor cried

Even her hair was now short. Only barely up to her shoulders.

The hair that she had looked after so carefully.

It was now somewhat dried.

Elinalise wasn't especially close to Nanahoshi.

But she had still known her for quite some time.

And over that time she had gotten to know what kind of expressions she made.

She had never seen Nanahoshi so shocked before.

Nanahoshi couldn't possibly be making it up.

She couldn't tell what was the truth.

It could be a trap by someone to try and take down Rudeus or Zanoba.

Right.

There were all kinds of magic tools to change one's appearance.

That said, to use it, one would have to infiltrate deep into the Sky Castle. It would be impossible to imitate Nanahoshi.

The only people capable of that would be those who knew Perguis's schedule to some extent and could determine when the Sky Castle would be mostly empty.

There weren't many people who fit that.

She was confused.

She was flustered to an extent that she had never felt in these last few years.

What should she do. What was the truth.

She knew only one thing.

"It must have been hard."

Elinalise stood up and moved next to Nanahoshi and embraced her tightly.

What she knew was that the the girl in front of her carried a scar on her heart.

"Elinalise-sama, the conversation isn't..."

"It's fine, I've heard enough.

You had to talk about something difficult.

I don't quite believe it but... Mmm.

Betraying someone's trust is unforgivable. I will properly punish Rudeus."

Therefore Elinalise put off finding the truth for now and decided to comfort Nanahoshi.

"Has Rudeus committed some kind of crime?"

"Yes, a terribly hateful crime."

"What would that be."

"He hurt you. No, not just you. Depending on how they feel, he could have also hurt his wives... Sylphy, Roxy, and Eris."

"I am uninjured."

"No, they have hurt your heart."

"Heart..."

Elinalise suddenly felt something odd while holding Nanahoshi.

She somehow knew something was off around her heart.

Elinalise often held people in her arms so she could tell.

She had never felt someone chest that felt like this.

There was no tangible sense of discomfort, but there was almost something inhuman about it.

"Found it!"

A loud voice rang out in the previously quiet cafe.

Looking at the entrance, you could see a man in a grey coloured robe pointing towards Elinalise's group.

It was Rudeus.

Following behind him was Zanoba.

It wasn't just the two of them, they were also with some of the Rudo Mercenaries.

"Catch it!"

Hearing Rudeus's shout, Elinalise strengthened her hold on the girl and right before she was about to shout back at him to wait a minute...

The person within her arms moved.

The girl shook off Elinalise's arms with strength she didn't think possible, and with unbelievable speed she flipped the table and jumped towards an open window.

Nanahoshi's figure had disappeared.

With tremendous speed.

Speed on the level of a Saint Class Swordsman.

Nobody present could follow.

The Rudo Mercenaries were also taken aback.

"Boss, Zanoba-sama... It's too fast. We can't keep up with that."

"It's true. That's the automaton that Shishou created. The average swordsman can't compare to it in speed or power."

"Don't go praising it now... For the time being, it doesn't seem like it's capable of acting in secret yet, let's spread out and search. As long as we know where it is, Zanoba and I will do something about it."

Rudeus issued instructions with tired look and walked up to Elinalise.

He stroked the head of the bewildered Clive who was still clutching his fork and confirmed that he was unharmed.

He walked towards Elinalise and extended a hand.

"I'm sorry about that Elinalise. Are you alright? Did it do anything to you?"

"...No, I'm fine."

Elinalise gripped his hand and stood up.

"So just what happened?"

"Well there isn't much to tell..."

After witnessing what just happened, Elinalise felt relieved.

She was misunderstanding something after all.

Part 3

Eris's job in the house was taking Leo and the children on walks.

Of course, she would also teach the children swordsmanship, she also had a class at the school.

But when it came to 『Household Jobs』 Eris only had walks.

As long as there was nothing pressing, they would head out early afternoon.

Of course, taking everyone out would be dangerous so she at most took 2~3 people.

When Leo would go out for a walk, Lara would get on his back as if it was natural so she would really only be taking one or two people.

Today, Lara and Sieg were riding on Leo's back and the still young Lilly was on Eris's shoulders.

And so, walking around the town and letting the children play somewhere suitable was Eris's daily routine.

Just a little while ago it was only Lucy, Lara, Ars, and sometimes Clive.

Back then Lara would often have her hair pulled by the boys of the neighbourhood until Lucy would stop them.

But lately because of Eris's training, Lara has been able to fight back.

When Eris had turned away for a second Lara was standing with a cut on her face and a bleeding nose.

Nearby were the boys she had fought with crouching down and crying.

Lara and Eris's eyes met and still expressionless she thrust out her fingers in a V declaring her triumph.

When Eris saw that she was somewhat troubled.

When she was younger she often got into fights was scolded for it.

A nobleman's daughter shouldn't be getting into fights, if someone says something to you, you return it with words, or so they'd say to her.

She wondered if she should scold Lara.

But she ended up praising her.

Lara didn't speak very much.

That shy girl standing up for herself was something to be proud of.

"Good job", "As expected of my daughter", was the kind of thing she said.

Of course, if Sieg or one the others had made someone obviously weaker than them cry, she would get mad.

She'd spank them until their behind was red.

But those boys were older and bigger than Lara.

And so Eris thought to herself that complementing her was right after all.

Thinking that Lara would be going to school next year, giving her nothing but praise might not be so good, but Eris didn't think that far ahead.

That said, today they weren't at the usual park, they were heading somewhere different.

There probably wouldn't be any fighting.

There wasn't any meaning to it, just a whim.

"Don't go too far from the bank!"

Today they had come to the river to play.

Lara and Sieg had taken off their clothes and jumped in with Leo.

Eris was watching Lilly.

Lately she had begun to toddle around.

Maybe because the river excited her, she walked up to it nervously and put her hand in and shrieked at the cold and ran into Eris's arms; she had already repeated it a number of times.

"Kyaa! Mama! Mama!"

"What is it? Is the water scary?"

"Cold!"

Hearing her half-baked answer, Eris let a smile slip and pet Lilly's head.

Lilly and Lara looked quite alike but Lara was somewhat more docile.

But Lilly was much more investigative than Lara. Whenever she found something, she would be exceedingly curious.

Just then, it looked like Lilly found something.

"Mama! Sparkles!"

"...Sparkles?"

"It's sparkling!"

Looking where she was pointing, beyond the shining surface of the river, something else was sparkling.

A fish.

A small fish about the size of a finger was swimming around.

"It's a fish."²

"Annoying!"

"Not annoying. A fish. Try saying it. Fi-sh."

"FISH! Mama, come on, catch it! Catch the fish!"

"Yes yes... Let me see it."

Eris rolled up her sleeves and looked in the river.

After a few seconds there was a splash.

And suddenly the fish was in Eris's hand.

The fish had no idea what happened and simply moved it's mouth bewildered.

"Here."

"Yay! Yay!"

Eris gave the fish to Lilly.

The fish then seems to realise the danger it was in and suddenly began to flop around.

It jumped off Lilly's hand and fell back in the river.

"It got away..."

"Huhu, it thinks it can... Hm?"

But in the middle of their exchange Eris sensed a presence.

"...Something's coming."

Something was heading towards them from the city.

Quite fast.

It would have to be Rudeus wearing the magic armour 『MK.2 revised』 or something of the same level.

"Leo. Go get the two of them! Have them put their clothes on too."

Hearing Eris's shout, Leo barked and began to push Lara back up the bank.

Lara was unaffected.

She probably already knew what was going on from talking to Leo.

Sieg grumbled that he still wanted to play but Lara grabbed his hand and they climbed out of the river and began to dry themselves.

"Lara, help Sieg put his clothes on!"

Sieg had only recently been able to put on his own clothes.

Doing up a single button was quite slow and without help, he'd take quite a while.

Eris was somewhat impatient.

She didn't feel any hostility from whatever was approaching but it was a bit too fast to grab the children and run.

Even if it was an enemy, she could probably win, but it would be better to have the children run.

The three children would run on Leo's back and she would confront the enemy.

Orsted's office was also close by.

The place where both The North God Kalman III and The Dragon God Orsted were staying. There was no doubt that they would be safe there but...

"...Huh, what?"

But seeing what was approaching, Eris let out a confused sound.
Because it was a face she knew.

A girl with black hair.
Nanahoshi.

"If it isn't Nanahoshi."

Nanahoshi was about to keep running right through but hearing her name, she suddenly stopped.

"Good morning. I apologise but may I inquire as to what your name is?"

"It's Eris. What, did you forget?"

"Eris-sama. I have committed it to memory."

Eris felt something was off.

Her hair was short, she was extremely fast, and her speech was different.

But Eris hadn't known Nanahoshi a particularly long time, she probably just thought that this kind of thing happens sometimes.

Well, Eris never was someone to worry about the small things.

"What's up, you're running real fast, are you chasing someone?"

"Yes... No, correction. I am running away."

Nanahoshi looked behind her and answered as such.
Behind her was an empty plain.

"Mama! Mama! Amazing!"

Seeing Nanahoshi's speed, Lilly walked up to her.
She was poking Nanahoshi's leg with a sparkle in her eye.

"Kyaa!"

Nanahoshi lifted her up from under her arms and Lilly let out a happy cry and laughed.

"Good morning."

"Haha!"

Lilly was grabbing Nanahoshi's hair and rubbing her face.

Eris didn't know why Lilly and Nanahoshi were so close but thinking that Lilly was being somewhat rude, she took Lilly from Nanahoshi and put her on her shoulders.

"Yaa~. Mama, can I have it?"

"No. That's rude."

Lilly sounded disappointed but Eris didn't put her down.

Seeing that, Nanahoshi grabbed a bunch of her hair.

"Do you want this?"

"...Yeah."

Seeing Lilly's restrained nod, Nanahoshi tore off a few strands and handed them to Lilly.

"Here."

"Yaay!"

Lilly took it and her face lit up again.

Eris didn't know why Lilly was so happy... But for now she reasoned that black hair was quite uncommon.

"Eris-sama, may I ask a question?"

Nanahoshi then looked at Eris and asked that.

"What is it?"

"Eris-sama is Rudeus-sama's wife 'Eris-sama' correct?"

"That's right."

Being called his wife, Eris puffed up her chest in pride and answered.

Hearing it from someone else, she was definitely proud.

Having given birth to the eldest son, and looking after the children like she was, she was most definitely confident that she was his wife.

"Eris-sama, would you knowing of my existence cause you to be angry at Rudeus-sama?"

"Existence...? I wouldn't get mad just from you being around."

Although she didn't know the reasoning behind the question, Eris still answered.

Nanahoshi was Rudeus's friend. She wouldn't get mad from them talking.

If he laid his hands on her, or asked to make her his fourth wife, she'd probably be a little mad though...

"Then what about Sylphy-sama or Roxy-sama?"

"I don't think they'd get that mad... Oh but maybe..."

Eris remembered something Sylphy once said.

"Sylphy once said that she just couldn't agree to Nanahoshi being around."

"Agree you say? What kind of agreement would that be?"

"I don't know. But that girl truly does love Rudeus so it probably has something to do with her feelings."

Eris had no hesitation in saying that she loved Rudeus but even she had to concede to Sylphy's dedication.

Sylphy would end her own life if it was for Rudeus's sake.

Of course, Eris was also prepared to die fighting to protect Rudeus.

But that was something she wanted to do.

With the things that she absolutely didn't want to do, she probably wouldn't be able to hold out.

Even if it was for Rudeus.

But Sylphy would. She would hold out for Rudeus.

Eris had to yield to that part of Sylphy.

"Understood. I would like to talk to Sylphy-sama. Do you know where she might be?"

"She should be at home today."

"Very well. I thank you for answering my questions."

Nanahoshi's mouth warped into a smile as she bowed and she turned around and began walking towards the town.

"I wonder what all that was about."

Eris folded her arms, put her feet shoulder width apart and let out a 'hmp' from her nose. It was the pose that Ars had often been imitating.

"...Mama."

Eris turned around and saw blue and green hair peeking out of Leo's back.

It was Lara and Sieg.

Thinking back, even though someone they knew came along, the two hadn't said hello.

That was something rare.

Normally Leo would take the initiative to walk up to people and they would greet them, but this time Leo had remained in the back the whole time.

But right when Eris thought that, Lara answered her question.

"...That person wasn't Nanahoshi."

Hearing that, Eris remembered her unease and her face stiffened.

On her shoulders, the hair that came from Nanahoshi that Lilly was holding suddenly stiffened and straightened out.

"....."

She didn't know the cause of her unease but she knew she should hurry home.
But then she remembered the children and changed her thoughts.

"We're heading to the office now. You two get on Leo."

For now, she'd take the children somewhere safe and then head home.
She helped the kids onto Leo's back and began towards the office.

Part 4

When Eris arrived at the office the atmosphere was quite heavy.
She also recognised the large number of Rudo Mercenaries gathering outside.
And it wasn't just them, Zanoba and Julie, Elinalise and Clive, and the North God Kalman III Alexander were all there too.

But the normal unpleasant aura was gone.
It seemed that Orsted was out.

“Eris! Why are you here!?”

And then, Rudeus walked out from the group.
Eris was relieved upon seeing him.
And at the same time, confirmed that her unease from before wasn't imagined.

“I ran into someone strange on our walk.”

Hearing Eris's answer, a danger could be seen in Rudeus's eyes.

“What kind of person?”

“They looked like Nanahoshi.”

Rudeus immediately looked like he wanted to ask something.
Like were they were or what happened.
But more so, was concern for the person in front of him.

“I see... So, did they do anything to you? Nobody was injured right?”
“The children are fine.”

Rudeus looked worriedly at the kids.
Lara, Sieg, and Lilly, playing with her hair.

“What about you? You’re not hurt or anything?”

After confirming that the children were unhurt, Rudeus began to confirm that Eris didn’t have any wounds.

Searching her from head to toe, touching her face, turning her around by the shoulders, and right about the time Rudeus’s hands reached her breasts a fist landed in his chin.

“I’m fine! Can you not understand that much by looking!”

“Hyii...”

“She didn’t do anything to us, but since Leo realised that she was a fake, we decided to retreat to here.”

Eris said that and looked at Leo.

And for some reason Lara looked especially proud.

Eris pat her on the head and turned back to look at Rudeus.

“So, just what was that?”

“Umm...”

Rudeus began a detailed explanation.

That the Automaton that he and Zanoba made ran away.

And how by the footprints around the teleport magic formations they had concluded that it was in the Magic City Sharia.

After that the two had followed it through the formation, woke up Julie who was lazing around in the workshop and enlisted the help of the Rudo Mercenary corp to search.

Using the incident with Elinalise as a starting point they had found it once but lost it again. They had received reports of sightings over town and so after using his clairvoyance eye from the city walls, they confirmed that it was heading towards the office.

Concluding that its goal was the office they went ahead.

And while observing the direction the doll was coming from with the clairvoyance eye, Eris had arrived.

“She didn’t seem all that bad though.”

“For now yes. But if we don’t find it quickly, we don’t know what will happen...”

Rudeus’s tone was resolute.

Rudeus believed that the doll had a flaw.

In the Automaton’s core were certain Directives.

Ensure Human Safety, Obey Commands, Self-Preservation.

In other words, the three laws of robotics.

But the doll had disobeyed orders and ran.

Which meant that there was, at the least, a flaw with the 『Obey Commands』 Directive.

For now, its interactions with Eris and Elinalise only ended with a conversation.

There hadn’t yet been any casualties but thinking that it was because of the 『Ensure Human Safety』 Directive would be wishful thinking.

If the 『Ensure Human Safety』 Directive wasn’t in effect, there was no telling if it would suddenly start a massacre.

“Eris, could you tell me in detail what you talked about with it?”

“In detail? It was mostly just small talk... If I remember right—“

Eris tried to remember the conversation she had with the doll.

But the more she talked the stiffer his face got.

His and Zanoba’s conversation, Elinalise’s conversation and Eris’s conversation.

Putting those together, he came up with a hypothesis of the doll’s actions.

When talking with Elinalise, it had constantly asked questions about his wives.

Last night, Rudeus had said that they would dispose of it because it would make his wives mad.

The doll had heard that.

The 『Obey Commands』 Directive didn’t seem to be functioning

But if the 『Self-Preservation』 Directive was in place it wouldn't be abnormal for it to take defensive manoeuvres.

But what would count as self-preservation?

In other words, to dispose whatever was threatening its existence.

What was threatening it?

That would be Rudeus's wives.

It didn't attack the sleeping Zanoba and Rudeus most likely because they were registered as Masters.

It may be contradictory but with a bug in it, contradictory actions wouldn't be odd.

Therefore the doll began to look into who his wives were.

And thought that it should erase them.

That said, all it did was talk to Eris, who should have been a target.

Which would disprove the theory.

No, maybe not.

Looking at the contents of its conversation with Eris, it seemed to be investigating which of his wives needed to be eliminated.

In other words, which one was the biggest threat to its existence.

It probably planned to eliminate the biggest obstacle.

And its conversation with Eris made the biggest obstacle perfectly clear.

“And after hearing where Sylphy was it headed back towards the city.”

Hearing that, his face went completely white.

“Sylphy's in danger!”

Rudeus began running towards the house, but immediately turned around and headed back to the office.

Once he was back in the office, he took a deep breath.

Once he had calmed down and caught his breath, he look at the surroundings. The Rudo mercenaries, Zanoba, Julie, Alek, Elinalise and Clive, and his own children. Rudeus first turned to the bored looking Alek and lowered his head.

“Alek, I’ll be leaving the children and Julie here. Can I leave them to you?”

“Yes, of course.”

First, ensure the safety of the children.

If Orsted was here, he would have had Alek do something else but it couldn’t be helped since he was out.

For the time being, since Alek was protecting them, they would be fine.

Julie was against being left behind, and since the doll walked past her while she was sleeping it would probably be fine, but it was decided that she would stay back on standby.

“Eris and Elinalise, I’d like you to head towards to school.

There’s a chance that it might go for Roxy.

There’s already a group of the Rudo Mercenaries stationed at the school so meet up with them.”

“Got it.”

“Understood.”

There was already a search group at the school lead by Rinia.

The doll said it was heading towards Sylphy but they still didn’t know what it was going to do.

It was better to have backup on the chance something did happen.

“Half of the mercenaries are to head to Aisha and give a detailed report.

Let her know that on the chance that things go south to request assistance from Pergius-sama.”

“Yessir!”

If they could borrow Pergius’s power, they could probably capture the doll in an instant.

Rudeus didn't think it would get this serious, so not only had he yet to contact his house, he regretted the fact that he had delayed telling everyone else.

Although it wasn't certain they would need to rely on him yet.

“The other half of the mercenaries are to head back to Zanoba's workshop.

“Understood.”

The doll had been moving all around but it's possible that it was all a diversion and it's real goal was to escape from Rudeus.

It could head back to the Asura Empire the way it came and simply run away.

There was a part of him that thought it would be fine to let the dangerous existence leave them... but it was something he had created himself. He had to take responsibility and deal with it until the end.

“Zanoba, you'll come with me to the house and ensure Sylphy's safety.”

“Roger that.”

“Alright, everyone, begin operation!”

On Rudeus's command, everyone scattered.

Part 5

The people left in the office were the children, Leo, Julie, and Alek.

“Now then, until your father returns, you can play with onii-san over here.”

Almost the instant their parents disappeared,
The smiling Alek began to talk to worried looking children.

Chapter 12

The Day The Doll Walked – Final Part

Part 1

At that time, Sylphy was at home looking after the 4th daughter Christina.

"That's good Chris,¹ now take you hands off and walk towards mama."

"Hmh~! Mama you come here...!"

Compared to the fast learner Lily, Chris could only barely walk while holding onto something.

And so recently she had been undergoing training like this with her mothers.

Although Chris had never really liked it and was shaking her head on the brink of tears.

"No you come over here, come on, do it slowly, slowly."

"Hm! Uuh... Mama~... Come..."

"No. Come on, I'm right over here."

Chris was grumbling and crying.

That said, it wasn't something she couldn't do.

She just like to be spoilt.

"*hic*... aah!"

She eventually shut her eyes, toddled over to Sylphy and jumped into her arms.

"There, there. You did great. Good girl."

"Nn~..."

Sylphy held Chris as she always did and stroked her head.

Chris, still sniffing, held onto Sylphy.

Compared to the energetic and curious Lilly, Chris was quite timid and withdrawn.

She belonged to the indoor faction and never went out much.

Eris occasionally took her out with the others, but she would always be stuck to her and she would often start crying and come right home because she was scared.

Therefore she wouldn't go out on walks and spent most of her time home.

"Chris, you're too shy. I wonder where you get that from..."

Sylphy said that, but, well, it definitely came from Rudeus.

"Mama... Papa, not home yet?"

"No, he's not home just yet."

Chris is what you would call a daddy's girl.

Ever since she was born she was always quick to cry but whenever she was in Rudeus's arms she would always stop.

She was the complete opposite of Ars.

Lately, Rudeus's lap has been her reserved seat.

"Aah!"

"...Hmm?"

She had heard a sound from the entrance.

Someone had probably come home.

"Papa?"

"I wonder... I don't think it is."

Rudeus had left yesterday.

He hadn't given an exact time, but he said he'd be 2~3 days.

So he shouldn't be back yet.

"Onee-chan?"

"It's a bit too soon to be Onee-chan."

It wasn't quite time for Lucy and Roxy to be back from school, or for Aisha to finish with the Mercenaries.

It could be Eris back from her walk.

No, She was out with the playful Sieg, so she'd probably be out a bit longer.

Then Lillia and Ars back from shopping.

No, the two of them just left. It would be too fast.

It's possible that they could be coming back because they forgot something...

It could be Zenith.

She was sleeping in her room, but she could have made her way into the garden without anyone seeing.

Sylphy kept thinking all kinds of things and put Chris on the couch.

"Chris, wait here."

Sylphy, somewhat baffled, headed towards the entrance.

After she left the living room and was halfway down the hallway, she heard a creak.

The door was half open.

But what Sylphy was looking at wasn't the door.

"..."

She was standing inside.

Sillouetted by the setting sun of the half open door, she stood there.

A black haired girl.

Just by appearance, she was the girl called Nanahoshi.

If they were closer, she might have called out to her.

But the moment Sylphy saw her, she frowned.

"...You're not Nanahoshi are you?"

Hearing that, the girl's lips warped into a smile.

With the lighting behind her, the look gave an ominous vibe.

"Yes. That is correct. How did you come to know?"

"Nanahoshi comes to our house quite often. Whenever she opens the door she has habit. She'll always knock twice and if there's no response, she'll open the door slightly and ask "Is anyone home?"² quietly."

Sylphy said that and put mana into her right hand.

An unknown existence imitating their friend had infiltrated her house.

For Sylphy, who had decided to protect their house, it was a matter of course.

For now, she couldn't feel any animosity from the girl in front of her.

Her voice didn't contain any emotion, but the way she spoke was polite.

But Sylphy wasn't naive enough to assume she was an ally.

"Who are you? If you're one of Hitogami's underlings, I'll be the one to take you on."

Saying that, gears began to turn in Sylphy's head.

She would blind the girl in front of her and grab Chris from the living room and Zenith from the second floor and run.

They had long since prepared for the possibility that someone would invade their house, but could she herself carry it out.

There hadn't been any sounds of battle, but Beet, coiled around the gate had probably already begun.

She had used her ring to signal Eris and Roxy, but would they notice?

Would Orsted and Alek in the office be able to grasp the situation.

She had to run.

Or at least stall for time.

Thinking all kinds of things, she glared at the opponent in front of her.

"I currently do not have a name."

"...?"

"Would it be possible for me to hear your name?"

"Sylphyette Greyrat."

Being suddenly asked, Sylphy reflexively responded.

"Then that would make you Rudeus-sama's wife, Sylphy-sama correct?"

"That's... right."

It had confirmed her name.

She had reflexively responded, thinking that it might have been better not to answer, Sylphy continued to remain vigilant.

It didn't look like she had a weapon.

She looked full of openings.

But Sylphy couldn't let her guard down. There were plenty of people that could overwhelm others empty handed.

"Would my presence cause Rudeus-sama to incur your anger?"

"...?"

"Sylphy-sama, why can you not agree to me?"

"I don't understand, what are you talking about..."

I was distracted. I shouldn't listen to her.

This could be some kind of illusion.

Sylphy thought that for an instant a took a wary step back.

"That is dangerous."

That instant, the girl shouted and reached out.

Her speed outclassed Sylphy.

The opponent was clearly faster than her, but Sylphy expected that.

She couldn't see it, but she could react.

The second her footing was stable, she would dodge to the side and counter by striking her with her magic.

The instant Sylphy decided that...

"Aah!"

She realised that Chris was by her feet.

When?

Right, when had Chris managed to toddle to the entrance.

She hadn't listened when Sylphy had told her to "wait here"

And by some twist of fate, she was right where Sylphy was about to step.

Once she realised, it was too late.

She had to somehow avoid stepping Chris.

But her balance was broken.

She wasn't certain she could get out of the way on her unstable footing.

And reflected in Sylphy's eye was a girl's hand that shot forward with incredible speed.

Part 2

When Rudeus arrived, the house was eerily calm.

Beet's post.

Aisha's garden.

Leo's dog house.

No one was there.

Peeking through the unlocked entrance, he could see the cleanly swept hallway and living room door.

It was calm.

No, it wasn't that there was no sound.

Only a cry resounded throughout the house.

It was a voice he knew well.

It was Chris's cry.

It was a cry of heartbreak.

It sounded like something important had been lost, as if alluding to some great sadness.

To Rudeus, it was a familiar cry.

A cry that whenever he approached, would quickly stop.

And although he heard it, for some reason, he still thought it was calm.

"...The mercenaries are to remain on standby."

Rudeus issued that order, opened the door as silently as possible and went inside.

Here, it was also calm.

The hall was clean.

He could see his own pale face reflected in the mirror set in the entranceway.

By, what was it?

What was the smell irritating his nose?

It was by no means a pleasant smell.

It was the kind of smell, that if locked up with, would make you want to vomit.

It was the kind of smell that would gather flies.

And as if invited by that smell, Rudeus walked down the hallway.

His destination was the living room.

It was where the sound was coming from, and he was confident that was where the smell was coming from too.

He looked at the tightly closed living room door.

Rudeus resolved himself and opened it.

An unbelievable scene opened up before him.

What first entered his eyes was the top of the table.

Chris was laying down crying.

And leaning over Chris was the black haired doll.

The doll's hand was dirtied.

A light brown like dried blood covered it.

That brown had lost its moisture and was giving off a strong smell.

It was a choking smell.

That smell couldn't possibly be...

"Oh, come on, you got poop on your hand didn't you."

"It's not a problem. This level of filth will not hinder movement."

"No, you have to properly wipe it off, see. After that, you wrap the diaper up like this and put it in the basket to wash later."

“After getting dirty, immediately proceed to wash, correct? It has been committed to memory.”

Sylphy wiped the doll's hands clean.

The substance covering the doll's hands and the smell in the hallway.

It was Chris's poop.

Chris was sleeping on the table but when her diaper was taken off, she began to cry.

“Papa! It's Papa!”

But as soon as she saw Rudeus, she stopped crying and smiled as sweet as a flower.

“...Hmm?”

Rudeus had a certain amount of expectations.

Sylphy fighting.

His wounded family... Or possibly his collapsed unmoving family.

But the sight of the doll clumsily changing a diaper was entirely outside of his predictions.

“Aah, welcome home Rudy”

“Sylphy, it looks like... you're fine...”

“Of course. There's no way I wouldn't be.”

Sylphy nodded and the doll behind her stood up.

Expressionless.

It's inhuman face was ominous enough that it seemed as if it would stab a dagger through Sylphy's chest any second.

But the doll saw Rudeus's gaze and took a small step behind Sylphy.

Almost as if it was using Sylphy as a shield.

But Rudeus saw something different.

It was as if the doll was afraid of being seen though by Rudeus.

“Sylphy, do you think you could step away from the doll?”

“...Why?”

Sylphy took a stance to protect the doll.

“That doll is something Zanoba and I made but it went berserk.

It probably overheard our conversation and went to eliminate you thinking it could take your place.”

Rudeus realised halfway through his explanation that something was wrong.

“But it seems that we were somewhat mistaken.”

That said, the fact that they didn’t know doll’s goal hadn’t changed.

Rudeus didn’t unfasten his guard and glared at the doll.

“Hmm, that’s a bit different from the story I heard.”

“What have you heard?”

Seeing Rudeus confused, Sylphy smiled.

“Yeah. It’s not all that short so you should sit down.”

“Yeah...”

As he was told, Rudeus went and sat down cross-legged.

Sylphy let out a “Hmm?” and tilted her head to the side.

“Rudy. Isn’t the way you’re sitting wrong?”

“Eh!? Aah, yes.”

Rudeus knew what Sylphy’s tone meant and changed his posture.

What he could feel from her tone of voice was anger.

Which meant that Rudeus had no pose besides Seiza.

“Ok then, go ahead.”

Seeing that he had complied, Sylphy turned around and walked behind the doll. She pushed the doll towards Rudeus and it stared at him expressionlessly.

“Master Rudeus, are you going to dispose of me?”

“Yes, we are.”

Hearing Rudeus’s immediate reply, the doll didn’t stir one bit.

But Rudeus knew.

With its skeletal frame of the same composition as the Magic Armour and its specially created artificial flesh, it had the combat power of a Saint Class swordsman.

If such a dangerous existence would no longer listen, there was no other option than to destroy it.

Wearing the Magic Armour and using his Magic Eye, he wouldn’t fall behind.

That said, he couldn’t let down his guard.

“.....I do not wish to be disposed of.”

Rudeus suddenly realised.

“ ... ”

The doll was frightened.

It appeared to simply be standing there.

Its face, expressionless.

It’s tone, unwavering.

But he knew it was frightened.

The doll moved its gaze towards Sylphy.

Its inhuman eyes somehow seemed to be asking Sylphy for help.

“It seems Rudy doesn’t understand, you’ll have to explain it to him from the start.”

Sylphy said that and the doll once more looked at Rudeus and Zanoba who entered the house before anyone realised.

And it began to talk.

“Rudeus-sama and Zanoba-sama had said:

That by being here, Rudeus-sama’s wives would get mad.

Elinalise-sama said that Rudeus’s wives are Sylphy-sama, Eris-sama and Roxy-sama.

Eris-sama said that she had once heard that Sylphy-sama could not accept Nanahoshi.

Elinalise-sama referred to me as Nanahoshi.

I thought, it had to be my resemblance to Nanahoshi that would be the cause for my disposal.

But I am not Nanahoshi.

Which would mean that there must be some way to prevent it.”

Her voice was monotone, but the desperation could be felt.

The doll was searching for a solution to its impending death.

“I do not wish to be disposed of.

Rudeus-sama and Zanoba-sama were both joyful at my creation.

I wish to be of use to the two of you.

Being disposed of, is not something I wish to happen.”

When using Summoning Magic, on occasion, the summoned being could be too powerful and cause harm to the caster.

But they fundamentally cannot harm the caster.

A summoned Magic Beast is loyal to its master.

Causing harm to the caster can only be a result of actions taken for the sake of the caster.

The doll also contained this principle.

Pergius’s Summoning Magic was used as the basis after all.

There’s no way it wouldn’t be there.

That said, Pergius's spirits possess self-awareness.

From the moment they are summoned they move with a sense of self.

For the sake of their master.

Using their long lives to be of use for even longer.

“Therefore, given the information that I obtained, I decided I would question Sylphy-sama whom I deduced to be challenging my existence.”

She had never broken the three laws of robotics.

Her nature as a summoned spirit has simply taken precedence.

“So I asked her, “What should I do to have you consent to me””

The doll had suddenly appeared and barged into the house.

It had Sylphy far more wary than usual.

But the doll had never possessed hostility.

As opposed to Sylphy who had nothing but animosity, it simply gave a terrible smile and wanted to talk.

And when it saw that Sylphy was about to fall over and land on Chris, it saved her and was worried if they were hurt.

When it noticed that Chris had had an accident in her pants from fear of being stepped on, it offered to change her diaper.

She had come to plea to Sylphy.

“I do not wish to die, I will fix any problem you might have with me, I wish to be of use, so please don't kill me, please”

Those words struck Sylphy's heart.

“Rudy, I won't get mad.

I already knew you wanted to create something like this.

It's a lot more, human, than I imagined...

But she's a good girl, even if she's got some kind of flaw, I'd like to put her to use."

Sylphy's words ended the doll's explanation.

Now they could only wait for Rudeus's decision.

Rudeus's mouth was in the shape of an \sim , his arms were crossed and his head was down.

His shoulders were trembling.

"Uuu."

Zanoba who was standing behind him also began to tremble.

Just as Sylphy was about to ask what was going on,

"Waaaaaah!"

Zanoba let out a cry and ran towards the girl.

"To think that you had thought about it like that!

To think that it was all for our sake!

I am sorry for saying you had gone berserk! It was my mistake!"

Zanoba, crying a waterfall of tears, hugged the doll.

Seeing the two of them like that, Rudeus let out a little snuffle.

His eyes were also moist.

Rudeus took his handkerchief out of his top pocket and blew his nose. He stood up and took the doll's hand.

"It's just like Zanoba said. Hearing that you're going to be disposed right to your face, of course you'd run.

You'd try to look for a way out...

I understand. Since Sylphy isn't going to get mad, Zanoba and I are going to properly finish you and properly put you to work."

"And I shall no longer fear Julie's indignation!"

The two were clinging to the doll crying.

Sylphy could see that the doll was somewhat surprised.

Confused that although the problem wasn't resolved, it was being forgiven.

Well in any case, it had been settled.

Sylphy was filled with pleasant feelings and pat Chris, who was feeling lonely being ignored by Rudeus, on the head.

But then she thought about something.

“Rudy, I just have one last question. Why did you think I would get mad?”

Rudeus began to quiver when he heard that.

He turned around and once more knelt down.

Cough

He began his explanation.

“Actually, the doll, down there, is quite elaborately——“

Sylphy got mad.

In any case, that was the end of this series of events.

Whether Rudeus got to sleep with his wives that night was another matter.

Part 3

As a result of this incident, the doll's disposal was dismissed.

Their plan became to maintain the doll to the best of their abilities.

And the doll that played the central role in the incident, was assigned a legitimate unit number.

Automaton No.01.

After that, Rudeus continues his experiments in the Lab and the Magic City Sharia and advanced many of his various plans.

But that's another story.

Nanahoshi also became aware of the doll's secret.

Discovering that a doll with her face functioned sexually, she was clearly displeased.

But after Rudeus prostrated himself and told her that he had already promised Sylphy that he wouldn't use it to that end, she somewhat forgave him.

“Well, it's fine. So, what's her name?”

“We haven't come up with one yet.”

“Really? Do you want me to give it one them?”

And so Nanahoshi named the doll.

The Automaton No.01 would be known as 『Anne』 .

And in case Nanahoshi's acquaintance were to ever appear, in order for him to be able to know of her existence, the doll would be given a Japanese-like name and so, 『Nanahoshi Hajime』³ was chosen.

If she were to ever meet Nanahoshi's friend, after saying that name, she would proceed to tell of her relation to Nanahoshi.

And so it's official designation was 『Automaton SS-01 Anne』⁴

They didn't yet know if Unit No.02 would be Deux and and Unit No.03 Trois, but they would work that out when they got there.

The SS stood for Seven Star.

That was how the first product of the Seven Star Series 『Anne』 was completed.

And her brothers and sisters slowly increased over the years.

But let it be known, that she was the only one with nipples.

Chapter 13

A Day at The Office

Part 1

I wake from my sleep.

It feels like a great morning.

At one time, this was the moment I most feared.

I feared that I would be killed in my sleep, or wake up someplace that wasn't my bed like a dim forest.

Until I found a bed that I felt was safe, I was always afraid of sleeping.

But there were also times when the lack of sleep chipping away at my alertness almost got me killed.

It got better when I found a technique that let me stay wary while sleeping...

But during those days, I never would have thought that I would eventually be able to sleep without worry.

“...”

I steady my breathing and head for the office's study.

The study is piled up with documents detailing the differences between the original history and the current loop.

Written in them is the 『Original』 and the 『Alternate』 .

The history where I did nothing is the 『Original』 .

And events that changed as a result of my actions are the 『Alternate』 .

I write these documents for the sake of defeating Hitogami.

To defeat Hitogami, I have exhausted no little amount of effort but there is a need to reach where he is.

The battle with Laplace 80 years from now is especially important.

Minimising our losses against him is directly related to defeating Hitogami.

And for that purpose, I'm going to freely use the 『Original』 and the 『Alternate』 to change history and ensure we have as much fighting power as possible.

Of course, since I can't take the documents with me on the next loop, right before each loop I organise all my actions and have no choice but to memorise them and try again.

But this loop is different.

Rudeus Greyrat is here.

With each person he encounters, the world greatly changes.

I had intended to record the differences as usual, but before I knew it they had turned into an observation diary of him.

Most of the pages have Rudeus's name written on them.

And with so many changes, my writings can't keep up.

I had originally intended to keep a detailed record of all events until the end of the loop but quite a bit of information has probably been left out.

Honestly, I don't think it has much point.

There's something odd about this loop.

It feels like something special is going on.

The chance of Rudeus being in the next loop is quite small which would render all these notes meaningless.

I most likely have to win with this loop.

That is what fate dictates.

We must store up as much fighting power as possible, I'll preserve as much of my Mana as possible and defeat Laplace with the bare minimum, so as to go all out against Hitogami.

That said, there's no reason to not take notes.

If I am to fail and on the next loop, Rudeus is still there, this information will certainly prove a powerful weapon.

“ ... ”

And now I'll record today's happenings.

First up is the information that came through the Lithograph.

Thanks to this communication lithograph, collecting information has gotten considerably easier.

In all the previous loops, if some change occurred, without going to the scene and collecting the information myself, I wouldn't be able to know the result.

I had gotten used to it, but due to my curse, it was quite stressful work.

Compared to that, now I can do nothing but sit and the information comes flowing in.

Before I had to go through a number of loops to know the full extent of the changes resulting from a single action, the difference in convenience is astounding.

Although, if Rudeus didn't exist, I would never have needed such a comprehensive information network.

I alone would never have caused so much change.

If too much was changed, on the next loop I would wonder where to begin.

And I'm still troubled on how to treat the Automaton he created.

I saw the doll he had named Anne, but I never thought something like that could be made with human hands.

Pergius was surprised too, that it was more human than his spirits.

That doll is most likely the existence that the Mad Dragon King Chaos dreamed of.

Chaos has already passed and is no longer in this world, but if he was still alive, he would have loved to join them in their doll making.

If he is still in the next loop, I guess I'll put off collecting his treasure.

“Alright.”

While thinking such things, when I looked at the communication lithograph I saw something rather interesting.

Information from Ariel.

It seemed as though Doga and Isolte got married.

As far as I could remember, the two of them were never married.

The chance of Isolte ever getting married was always quite small.

And children go without saying.

This would also have to be because of Rudeus.

How would I ever manage to reproduce this.

At my current level, I haven't a clue...

Although before I attempt to reproduce such an occurrence, I would have to see what kind of person their child is and what kind of role they'd play.

Depending on the circumstances, I may end up preventing their child from being born.

But if I did that, Rudeus would most likely oppose me.

“ ... ”

I do not wish to lie to or deceive Rudeus.

Even if in the case that he's in the next loop, he'd forget about everything.

Part 2

“Good morning!”

Mid way through my documentation Rudeus appeared.

“...Yes.”

“Is it paperwork again today? You’re always so devoted Orsted-sama.”

“No more than usual”

“The fact that it’s usual is what’s important! Life is long after all so you have to take it little by little! As expected of Orsted-sama! You do understand!”

Rudeus sometimes gets strange.

He’s normally quite docile.

But his attitude does follow a pattern.

When he gets this high spirited, it’s because something good is happening.

And conversely, when he’s very quiet and apologetic it means he has something hard to say.

He’s rather easy to read.

“What’s happening today?”

“As expected of the President! Vigilant as always! Hehe, This morning Lara said that she wanted to be with papa forever! How do I put it. Ehehe.

Chris is always clinging to me but I never expected to hear it from Lara, so I was a little excited. Hehe.”

“Did you bring them with you?”

“Yeah. I brought Lara and Sieg here on Leo.”

Sieg as well hmm.

That’s somewhat unexpected.

But when I thought that, Rudeus’s complexion took a turn.

“Aah, about Sieg! It seems that he’s a fan of Alek.

He enjoyed the story of the Biheilil Kingdom that he heard from Alek.

And he asked me if I was going to meet with the North God-sama to take him along so he could hear the story again.

He’s with Alek right now.”

“Right.”

“Umm... Should I not have brought children to the office after all...”

“No, I don’t mind.”

Rudeus’s Achilles’ heel is his family.

He treasures them. Rudeus lives for his family.

He’d do anything for his family, and if you hurt them, you will become his enemy.

He’ll hit you with all kinds of unthinkable attacks from all directions, and when it looks like he’s about to lose, he’d easily throw away his pride and betray Hitogami or the like and beg for forgiveness.

I can’t name too many people as devoted as he is.

So to be his ally, you have to pay attention to his family.

At the very least, any mistreatment is forbidden.

Which is why I’ll assure their safety to the best of my ability.

As long as I protect what is precious to Rudeus, he won’t betray me.

That would be impossible for Hitogami.

Leaving aside the calculating thoughts, it’s quite bizarre that Rudeus’s children are immune to the curse. But I don’t dislike it.

I don’t dislike the liveliness.

It almost makes me feel like a normal person.

“Because your children are cute.”

I had intended to complement his children with a smile...

But Rudeus’s expression became serious.

Not good, this look is not good.

That is Rudeus's cautious look.

I'll have to be careful.

This man can suddenly go from peaceful to pulling off unbelievable things.

It might seem fine, but it's possible the next time I wake up I might be buried alive.

At this instant it would be simple to defeat him but if he came at me with a surprise attack...

"Even if it's Orsted-sama, I won't give you my daughter."

"...That wasn't my intention."

With that, Rudeus's face returned to normal.

"I'll bring the two in to say hello later."

"I don't mind. There's no need to be respectful."

"Is that right... Well, Lara is a somewhat impolite girl, so that's probably for the better."

Rudeus sat down on the sofa.

"Well then, let's work hard at work today as well! What shall we do today?

A mock battle with the 『MK 1』 ? Or maybe an adjustment of the Curse nullification Helmet?

Or maybe we should check on the progress of the 『MK 3』 or the adjustment of the 『MK 0』 ?

Or we could conduct another meeting on our future actions..."

They're all things Rudeus is in charge of.

He probably wants to show off to his children.

But a little bit before when I was filling in my files, I remembered something.

It's just something small regarding the war with Laplace but it would be better to do it now.

"Yes, about that..."

This year a drought in the southern part of the central continent will cause a famine.

A number of families will die.

But that in itself isn't important.

It's the natural course of things.

The problem is one particular household among them.

It's an unimportant house without any particular characteristics, but the youngest son alone is special.

If he is allowed to grow up, he will become an excellent commander.

And he will be in charge of the defensive battle at East Port against Laplace.

He displays unrivalled commanding ability and manages to delay the King Dragon King army for a substantial amount of time.

Normally I would make sure the Laplace war doesn't occur, and it's better to not intervene considering mana conservation.

But this time, although the war with Laplace is unavoidable, Rudeus is also here.

So considering the direction we're heading, it would be better to make sure they survive.

“And that's how it is.”

After my explanation, Rudeus seemed somewhat disappointed.

“Lara won't be able to see me working on a business trip...”

“Then it's fine if you leave tomorrow.”

Seeing how disappointed he was, I offered an alternative but Rudeus shook his head.

“No, without knowing exactly when they'll starve, it's better to act quickly.

I don't think we'll be late but humans are fragile, it wouldn't be odd for them to die any day.

I have arrangements to set out in place for time such as this so it would be best to leave as soon as possible.”

But somehow I ended up convincing him.

“If that is fine with you then so be it.”

“Of course. I’ll begin preparations immediately.”

Rudeus immediately left for the office’s warehouse to pickup the equipment he always has on stand by.

He returned about fifteen minutes after that.

He’s dressed in traveling clothes with a backpack full of provisions, the Scroll Vernier, and all kinds of other things.

He faces me and brings his fingers together and with his flat hand he hits his forehead.

“Well then, I’m sorry to ask this but if you could please take the two of them home at a suitable time.

Leo is with them so they should be fine, but it would be too late by the time something happens.”

That goes without saying.

I have no intention to make light of the reason that he’s my ally.

“Of course.”

“Well then, I’ll be off.”

After he says that, he immediately heads to the basement where the teleport magic circles are located.

In these past few years, his decision-making time on these kinds of actions has shrunk. And he will almost certainly accomplish his mission.

I had used people to accomplish tasks in previous loops before.

I have also had people you could call subordinates.

But I have never had someone so capable who would faithfully carry out my orders.

I can somewhat understand the feelings of Hitogami as he manipulates his apostles.

“ ... ”

I could tell that I had knitted my eyebrows.
Rudeus is a reliable man, but I shouldn't overuse him.
At the very least, feeling like Hitogami is not a good thing.

That said, the things I can do are not many.
I have already used too much Mana in this loop.
I may have decided that I would fight with Rudeus, but it still isn't a good enough reason to waste Mana.

“ ... ”

For now I put on the curse nullification helmet and head outside.
When I pass Faria she jumps a little.

“Aah! If it isn't the president.”

I seem to have surprised her.
But thanks to the helmet, it's only to that extent.
Without it, her reaction would be quite different.
The way to make it has been recorded in the documents. Improving in would be difficult but reproducing it is possible.

“Rudeus-sama just went out a little while ago, is Orsted-sama also setting out? Would you like a companion?”

“No need. I'm only going a short distance. I'll be back soon.”

“Understood.”

I head outside.
I could hear a voice coming from the side.

“It was then! Whoosh! Taking advantage of the slight opening, the Sword King Eris cut off the Third's arm!”

A voiced echoed in the back courtyard, originating from a small patch of shade.

“Standing before the now one armed Third was North God Kalman the Second and the Demon Lord Atofe Ratofe!

Behind him, the Mad Sword King Eris and Sorcerous King Rudeus!

His front and back were covered by people who wouldn't listen! There was no use in talk!

The duel was practically decided! The Third prepared himself!

But in the moment they thought victory was in their grasp! Whoosh! The Third ran into the Earth Dragon valley!”

Under the shade there was a man sitting on a rock.

And on the ground in front of him, a young boy.

The man on the rock is North God Kalman III Aleksander Ryback.

The young boy is Sieg Saladin Greyrat.

He's gotten much bigger since I last saw him.

Time really does fly by quite quickly.

“The Third ran!

Deciding that he would have his chance at victory another time, he fled into the Earth Dragon Valley.

There was no human who follow him into the valley and live.

The only two were his wounded father Alex and the Demon Lord Atofe!”

“Those two aren't human?”

“Correct! The two of them aren't human!

They possess the blood of the Immortal Demon race!

And their opponent who had just barely escaped from them was the same!

But then! Wham! With a huge sound, a giant had flown!

Who was it that jumped in!

Was it the Second? The Demon Lord? The Mad Sword King!?

No! It was Rudeus Greyrat!”

“Papa!”

Sieg is in a daze with Alek's story, but I wonder where Lara is?

I tried searching for a presence and there was one coming from the mountain of straw in the office garden.

When I went to take a look, there was a blue haired girl calmly napping on top of it.

At her feet a huge white beast is keeping watch.

Lara and the Sacred Beast Leo.

Lara is the Saviour that the Sacred Beast chose, but looking at her like this, she's nothing more than a child.

But I wonder why she suddenly said she wanted to be with Rudeus.

I just parted with Rudeus at the entrance to the office so I don't think more than an hour has passed...

Come to think of it, I remember hearing that Lara liked pranks.

Perhaps to get out of being punished for pulling some joke, she used her father.

If that's the case, I feel sorry for Rudeus, being used like that...

“Still riding his half destroyed Magic Armour, he alone chased after me!

All by himself!

He hit the Third who was trapped in the air! Wham! He hit the Third with the huge Magic Armour! And hit! And hit!

BOOOOOOOM! The Third and Rudeus crashed into the floor of the Earth Dragon Valley!

When the dust cleared, standing there was the one-legged, one-armed Third!

And Rudeus, his Magic Armour full of cracks!

Nobody was coming to help. It was a one on one fight!”

“One on one!”

It seems like Alek is telling Sieg the story of the Biheilil Kingdom.

Lara most likely fell asleep right as she got here so he's been entertaining Seig.

“But Rudeus didn't have the strength to overcome the Third.

He managed to cut off a hand with a surprise attack, but that wasn't enough to defeat him!

The Third thought that and began to carefully observe Rudeus.

He had let down his guard.

He thought that because Rudeus is a Magician, in a fight, he would shoot off his specialty the Stone Cannon while retreating.

He didn't think he could lose to someone who did nothing but run away!

Rudeus did exactly that! He ran and shot Stone Cannons!

He may have underestimated his opponent, but the Third was a battle hardened veteran!

To avoid the Stone Cannon, the Third retreated for an instant!

But it disappeared from right in front of him! It was a feint!"

"A Feint!"

"Klang! The second he realised, the Third sent out a slash! Too weak! Because of the feint, because he took a step back it wasn't a fatal wound!

But it still worked! The Third flew backwards but suddenly... his foot floated in the air.

It was Rudeus! He still had a trump card saved right for the very end! Gravity manipulation!

The same magic as the King Dragon Sword Kajakt! The Third for just an instant, floated!

Wham! The instant he realised, the third had already been sent flying! Bang Bang Bang Bang Bang Bang Bang Bang! He hit! And he hit! And he hit!

Rudeus's strongest Magic Tool blasted the Third into pieces! Dudududu! The Third was no longer breathing...

He could no longer stand.

Kling...! The King Dragon Sword fell from his hand.

Rudeus had won!"

"Hooray!"

Sieg let out a cheer.

Alek seems satisfied talking about his own defeat.

Feeling the pleasant atmosphere I walk up to Alek.

"Aleksander Rybak."

"Oh, If it isn't Orsted-sama! Are you heading out?"

"No, Rudeus just departed."

"I saw, he entrusted the children to me. He said to take them home at an opportune time and explain the situation to his wives."

I see, Rudeus left it to Alek.

The there's no reason for me to go... I guess.

“That's good to hear. I'll leave it to you.”

“Yes sir!”

I nodded at his response and headed back inside.

Part 3

Evening.

After completing the first stage of my recount, I left the study.

It seems Alek hasn't yet delivered the two of them home.

The sun is about to set, it would probably be better to have them back sooner.

Fariastia's hours must have ended because she's no longer at the reception.

"Your Papa normally walks around like he's cowardly and incompetent.

In fact, he probably really is a coward.

But when he gets mad he's scarier than anyone else."

Even now, they're still talking.

But now instead of telling a story, he sounds as if he's teaching something.

Sieg is listening with a serious expression.

"When facing that unyielding spirit, I lost.

Orsted-sama apparently had a similar experience.

Of course, someone such as him didn't fail to overcome it like I did.

And because I couldn't defeat his spirit, was most likely the reason I became his subordinate.

But do you understand why both Orsted-sama and I recognise him?"

"Hmm?"

"That's because he's strong."

"Papa, strong? But Papa would lose to Red Mama..."

"Yep. That's right. But it's a little different from normal strength."

I'm also somewhat interested in how Alek sees Rudeus.

"Your Papa has no redeeming features besides his mana.

Your Papa can't wear Touki by nature.

His judgement isn't particularly high, and when confronting unexpected circumstances he'll panic.

His eyes aren't that good. Even with his Magic Eyes, he's only reached the level below Orsted and I.

His reactions are slow. No matter how far ahead he can see with his Magic Eyes, his body can't keep up.

He'll hesitate when killing people, he has trouble delivering a killing blow to a flesh and blood enemy.

His chantless magic is a point in his favour, his magic activations speed is unmatched among Magicians, but compared to us swordsmen, it's still too slow.

In the time it takes him to kill me with one 『Stone Cannon』 I can kill him three times.

That is to say, no matter what he does, if I feel like it, I can take him out.

No matter how many different kinds of tactics he has, none of them have any meaning.

And I'm not even the world's strongest. In just speed, I'm one or two ranks below top class.

Of course, he could retreat and throw out all kinds of complex magic, but him having the chance to do that is unlikely.

In other words, if you systematically analyse him, he just doesn't seem cut out for fighting.”

“Papa... Is weak...?”

Sieg looks quite sad.

Having their father admonished to their face, there are very few children who that wouldn't make sad.

Especially because Rudeus showers his children with love.

“Aah, don't give me that look.

I'm not done talking yet.

Listen. The reason your Papa is strong, is because he knows his weakness better than anyone.

That's why he can get rid of his weakness and think of how to take advantage of his strong points.”

“Hmm?”

“Yup. He can use the Magic Armour to increase his speed many times over.

Meaning that, even if you catch him by surprise, he can still manage to survive.

That means that even I can't take him out.

Of course, he's still not on the same level. The disadvantage doesn't change.

But he has taken a step towards our level.

He can't wear Touki, he's a magician whose only merit is his mana.

But despite that, he doesn't run, he stands against us.

Sometimes fair and square, sometimes cowardly from behind, sometimes borrowing his friends power, and sometimes all by himself.

Do you know why, even though he's at a disadvantage, he can still fight?"

Sieg shook his head.

"It's to protect you.

For the sake of the family he loves dearly, he can't die."

When Alek said that, Sieg's eyes seemed to sparkle.

He excitedly clenched his fist and looked up with a smile plastered on his face.

"Papa really is a Cheddar Man!"

"Yeah, he's a Cheddar Man! A true Hero!"

A word I haven't heard before came up.

Cheddar Man?

Just what kind of metaphor is that?

Or maybe it's a person?

This is the first time I've heard it over the years.

In that case, it might be something Rudeus coined.

That man is constantly creating new words.

I'll ask him next time I see him.

I'll add Cheddar Man to the list of items in my head.

"Hey, North God-sama! I want to be a Cheddar Man too!

"You can, to be a true hero requires effort. My father is a true hero and he said so. Did your Papa not tell you that?"

“Papa didn’t say anything.”

“Is that so. Well, when you get a bit older, your Papa will tell you too.”

“What will effort do?”

“It will make you stronger.”

“How?”

“You have to train your body, and study the sword and magic.”

“I understand! North God-sama please teach me the sword!”

“Eeh? Me?”

“Can’t you?”

“If you want to learn the sword, can’t you have your Mama teach you the Sword God Style?”

“I want you to teach me! I wanna surprise Papa and Mama!”

“Although I do consider myself somewhat good, all I could pass onto a disciple of mine is what my father taught me, somewhat badly, I’m not all that cut out for it.”

North God Kalman III Aleksander Rybak’s childhood memories are quite unpleasant. When he became a North God, there were more than 20 people studying under him. But after a few years, they had all separated from Alek to walk their own paths. After that, Alek never took on another disciple.

“But you look so cool when you’re fighting. If I have to study I want it to be with the North God.”

“But me taking a disciple with my inexperience...”

Alek seems troubled.

I suddenly remembered Rudeus.

While declaring his own inadequacies, he taught all kinds of people all kinds of things. And without exception, they were all thankful for it. I am one of those people.

“Aleksander Ryback. Go ahead and teach him.”

Hearing me say that, Alek seemed quite taken aback. He looks as if he hadn’t even noticed me approach.

Even though that couldn't have been the case.

“Orsted-sama... But I'm still not even qualified as a North God...”

“That's exactly why you should train him. If you watch him and raise him all by yourself, you just might discover just what it is about the North God Style you are lacking.”

In the original history, North God Kalman III Aleksander Ryback corrected himself after losing to Jino Blitz.

And in his despair he took a single child as his disciple.

That child was in no way talented, but by watching him grow and and correcting himself, he matured into a true North God.

And in the second Laplace war, North God Kalman III proved himself to be history's strongest North God.

I don't know where that child might be in the current loop, but Alek has already experienced a loss.

So I might as well accelerate his acceptance of a disciple.

And incidentally, Sieg is also quite talented.

It's most likely the Laplace factor but his physical strength is far above other children.

It's not on the level of the Miko Zanoba, but in the future he'll be able to swing a sword with ease.

Those who stand out from the crowd end up at the North God School.

And this case is no exception.

And while I'm talking, there was one thing that Alek failed to understand.

Rudeus's strength is not just his mana.

It's that when it comes down to it, Rudeus had friends who will come running for him.

And that he has friends in places other than a battlefield.

In a one on one fight, Alek may be correct...

But by being with his children, maybe he might realise that.

And from that, maybe he'll become a North God more noble and strong than in the original history.

“I’ll convince Rudeus for you.”

“...If Orsted-sama says so, I understand.”

Alek smiled at me and turned to look at Sieg.

“Alright then, Sieg-kun, From tomorrow onwards I’ll be training you. But if you want to surprise your Papa and Mama, you’ll have to keep it a secret from them, alright?”

“Yeah!”

Sieg is looking at Alek with sparkling eyes.

Alek seemed bewildered at having such a small disciple after such a long time.

He must be quite enthusiastic to genuinely teach someone swordplay after so long.

They’ll definitely make an excellent pair.

But...

“...Aleksander Ryback, may I ask you something?”

“Of course!”

“What’s that thing on your back?”

On Alek’s back is a large number of some kind of spiky fruit.¹

There’s also something that looks like a human child’s clothing mixed in.

You could call it some kind of prickly child insect.

“Aah, this was Lara-dono’s work. She must have been bored because she snuck up to me from behind and stuck it on.”

“ ... ”

“It was the doing of a child after all. I’ll remove it later.”

Lara really does like her pranks.

I’m convinced.

“And the girl herself?”

“She went into the office.”

She couldn't have found her way into one of the teleport magic circles could she?

But the second I thought that and began to search for a presence, she walked out from the Office.

With a blank look, on top of Leo.

Fariastia's presence was also in the office.

She was most likely keeping Lara company on the second floor.

“Lara-dono! Leo-dono! It's about time we returned home!”

“...ok.”

Lara grabbed Sieg and pushed him onto Leo's back.

She then got on herself and proceeded to sit behind Sieg and hold him.

“Then we shall head out.”

Under Alek's leadership Leo began to walk.

Hmm?

Right as they walked passed me Lara looked at me and gave an evil little laugh of success.

I wonder what the meaning of that was.

I didn't understand but after seeing them off, I returned to the office.

Fariastia was once again at the reception, probably having come down with Lara.

I told her that it was about time she went home and headed inside.

“Hmm...”

It was then I understood the meaning of Lara's smile.

My chair.

The spiky fruits were scattered all over my chair.

If I were to sit like this, my behind would most likely be covered in them.

A prank.

Feeling the corners of my mouth slightly raise, I gathered the fruits and put them in a bag. But when I was about to put the bag in the desk I felt something was off.

“Hmm...?”

It was a slight unease.

It's the same unease as an assassin using poison.

Because of my Magic Itemmana bestowed item and Saint Dragon Touki, not even ancient poisons can harm me but I still felt some unease.

“ ... ”

But I had opened the drawer completely off guard.

And then grasshoppers came jumping out at me from inside.

5 of them.

So I was supposed to feel relieved after seeing the spiky fruits and then this was meant to surprise me. A two stage plan.

Lara most likely waited behind the reception until I went out, before intruding to commit the crime.

She must be happy with herself.

“ ... ”

But Lara really is the only one who I have no idea how she'll grow up.

That's most likely what Hitogami is afraid of about that child.

Part 4

Several day later, Rudeus returned.

He didn't just complete his goal, but apparently also made it rain and somewhat helped the drought.

He really is an efficient man.

After receiving his report I decided to tell him about Sieg.

"...I would like to have Sieghart commute here regularly."

"Why would that be?"

Naturally he seems somewhat puzzled.

Now how shall I explain it?

"There's something I'm somewhat interested in so I would like to watch over him."

"...Is it dangerous?"

"No."

"Will he be back by curfew?"

"That's not a problem."

"Understood. For the time being I'll let the women know."

He probably hasn't asked for any more confirmation due to his faith in me.

Or perhaps he simply gave up due to my insufficient explanation.

"You aren't going to ask?"

"No, I somewhat understand that someone will be teaching him something... Although I don't understand why it's a secret from me."

"Aah."

"I think it's better that way. Give Alek my regards."

We've been seen through.

But I'm grateful that's the case.
My interactions with Rudeus will continue.
It's better when the other party can understand you.
It's somewhat better as a secret after all.

"Well then, I'll be off."

"Good work today."

Right as Rudeus was about to leave,
I remembered a certain something I wanted to ask.

"Rudeus."

"Yes?"

"What is a Cheddar Man?"

"He's a Hero who's head is made from cheese.
He finds hungry children and tears off bits of his face to feed them.
He defeats bad guys who try to scare people with a single punch."
"...Was there a man like that in your previous world?"
"In my world he was made of bread filled with red bean paste.
But since red bean paste doesn't exist here it was replaced with cheese.
I tell it to the children as a bedtime story."

I learned something.

Cheddar Man.

Although I don't understand why he tears off bits of his face.

"What about it?"

"Nothing, I was just a little curious."

"I see. Then I'll be heading out."

After seeing that Rudeus had left I returned back inside.

Part 5

When I returned to my desk I saw the bag of spiky fruits that Lara left.

The grasshoppers had already hopped outside.

After she got home she was probably scolded for the prank she was running away from too.

“Haa.”

I let out a sigh.

Lara and Fariastia.

Aleksander and Sieg.

And Rudeus and Cheddar Man.

This loop really is quite fresh.

[Diary of Vacation in Millis]

Chapter 14

Greetings to the Latrea House

Part 1

I thought we should go for a family vacation.

The children are steadily growing up.

Lucy has grown accustomed to the Magic University.

Lara doesn't really like to study, but she's still plenty energetic.

Ars is somewhat wild like Eris but he's quite diligent in what he does, and he's not one to pick on those smaller than him, so he should be fine.

Sieg is still quite small and he's still a crybaby, but since he started being trained by a certain someone, he's gotten somewhat stronger.

Lilly and Chris are still young, but they've recently graduated from breast milk and have begun their education.

There's not yet a seventh, but the 6 of them are still young children.

Everyday is lively and the problems never stop.

That said, Lara and Ars have begun to go to school, and Sieg and Lilly have begun to walk, so after all of them began their studies, things have quieted down somewhat.

There's no signs that Hitogami might be plotting something.

The truly peaceful days have continued.

So that might be why.

Why I thought that it might be time to show the children the world outside of the Magic City Sharia.

I wonder why I suddenly thought that.

Maybe because that night was particularly lively.

Lucy was keeping to herself.

Lara was playing with her food.

Ars was being picky.

Sieg was stuffing his cheeks.

Lilly was cutely sipping her soup while dirtying her bib.

And Chris was on my lap with her mouth open wide waiting for her next bite of food.

As well as three wives, one little sister and two mothers.

It was lively dinner table.

But it's not just dinner time, lately the house is always lively.

But that's a given.

With 6 children there's no way it wouldn't be.

Ars and Lara are rascals that love to cause trouble.

Lily and Chris, maybe because they're the same age, often get into loud fights.

Lucy has it together and Sieg is rather docile, but that doesn't mean they're always quiet.

The noise never dies down.

So that's when I thought:

As long as we have the chance.

I have no idea what will happen when the children grow up.

I might be somewhere fighting someone with Orsted, or some of them might have left Sharia.

When they get older, they'll be going to School in the Asura Empire for three years, so they might settle down there.

Or they might even decide to leave the house by themselves before that.

Paul also fought with his father and left.

Something similar might happen to me.

Hitogami also has it in for me, so there are plenty of times that he could interfere.

But children never do exactly as they're told.

Lara doesn't like studying or training so she often runs away.

But that's fine.

In any case, that's what I thought.

That the children won't all be together forever.

That's why, we should take a family vacation while we can.

Part 2

Of course, it's not as if we'll be circumnavigating the world.

For about a month we'll visit some people we haven't seen in a while and show the kids something different.

Nothing too adventurous.

So with that said, the destination is the Millis Continent.

The plan is as follows:

First we use the Teleport Magic Formation to transfer to the Holy Millis Kingdom.

There we'll stay there for about 10 days.

The first half will be with Zenith's parents and Cliff and the church.

After that is a field trip to the Adventurers Guild HQ, the Magic Tower, and other places the city is famous for.

Next is a trip by carriage along the Holy Sword Highway for a quick stop off at the Great Forest.

Then a visit to the hot springs in the Azure Dragon Mountain range.

And finally we return home via the Teleport circle around there.

And while we're there I'll make contact with the Ore God that I had put off meeting up till now.

It should go something like that.

We've already discussed it as a family and have been planning for half a year.

Roxy has her job as a teacher after all, and I had to consult Orsted as the company president.

The kids also have their studies, everyone has plans.

That said, the entire family had agreed.

Lucy especially, she may have gotten the idea when we visited the Asura Empire before, when she heard that we're going on a trip she was really excited.

I already asked Elinalise if she wanted to come along and she made her feelings rather apparent.

She was quite happy to have an excuse.

She goes to see Cliff a number of times throughout the year, but she would much rather be with him all the time.

Cliff also wants to move up the ranks faster so he can bring Elinalise and Clive to him, but the Millis Church's power struggles seem like quite the ordeal.

And since we're going to be visiting the Latrea house, Zenith and Lilia are coming too.

I'd like to have the Miko tell me what she's been thinking again.

Lara can apparently converse with her, but she doesn't talk about it all that much.

Whenever I ask her, she just looks like it's a pain.

At her age she might not understand the importance.

Leaving Lara aside, although it may be personal business, the Miko and Pope are Millis officials so I did make appointments to meet with them, so there's a good chance I'll be able to see her.

This time I've also asked Norn to come.

I promised Claire I would last time after all.

No, I don't think I promised.

In any case, I decided it would be better to take her along while she's still in the happy aftermath of her marriage.

And I've already conveyed the fact that she's married.

No matter who the recipient is, my words will not waver. Including the fact that he's from a Magic Race.

I still haven't gotten a response, she might be mad.

She might just be pretending she didn't hear.

But, it's probably a matter of race.

At first Norn refused on the grounds that her child was still young.

Maybe because Sperd children mature fast but, Norn's daughter Luicelia was already off breast milk and had all her teeth. Her hair is green like her father and she's just started taking steps swinging around her cute tail, but she had yet to open her eye.

But Ruijerd said something to her.

“I’ll look after Luicelia. You should go.”

“But...”

“You have to treasure your family.”

And so Norn listened to those words heavy with emotion.

It seemed like Ruijerd wanted to go himself.

“Although I am somewhat oblivious to Human customs, a greeting is at least necessary,” he said.

But bringing along both a baby and a Sperd along on a month long trip would be a little difficult.

Although we could put a hat on them like Sieg, we can’t hide the tail, and it’s not just the green hair, but a real Sperd...

There’s no way we wouldn’t create a ruckus wherever we went.

And there’s also Ruijerd’s assignment from the Beheilil Kingdom.

And so, although he was somewhat downtrodden, he sent Norn off.

“I understand. But I’m only going to greet them. I won’t be going to the hot springs, I’ll be returning home.”

“You don’t have to leave, Just take your time.”

“I want to be together with Ruijerd-san and Luicelia.”

And so, Norn, while bragging as such, agreed to come along.

I’ve left Zanoba and a few members of the Mercenary corps to house sit.

Beet and Jiro are home, but just in case.

I’d be troubled if we got robbed and there’s also the care of the vegetable garden.

So that’s what our travel plans look like.

It’s somewhat roundabout, but sticking to a strict schedule isn’t as fun.

About this much is perfect.

Part 3

It's been half a year since then.

It's snowing as always in Magic City Sharia

We called a carriage and we're now riding through the snow laden city towards the office.

After giving our greetings to Orsted we went through the teleport formation to Milishion.

The other end of the teleport circle comes out in a secret hideout in Milishion.

And all of a sudden we're in the Millis continent.

I never strongly felt like I wanted to take a trip.

But since it was possible, I would have liked to take a formation leading to outside the city so we could see it from there.

Witnessing the gargantuan towers, the excitement of walking through the massive ramparts, it's something that has to be experienced.

That said, when we go outside to sightsee, we'll be able to do that then.

There's no rush.

After getting on the carriage I had prepared there earlier, we headed straight towards the Latrea house.

We have 14 people, 15 including me.

Taking that into account, I prepared 2 large carriages.

The first is me, Roxy, Zenith, Lilia, Lara, Chris and Leo.

The second is, Sylphy, Eris, Lucy, Ars, Sieg, Lily, Aisha and Norn.

We had already bid Elinalise and Clive a temporary farewell and the two headed straight for Cliff.

The kids were quite excited to be traveling for the first time, it took some time for their mothers to calm them down.

Lara seemed especially excited by the Milishion scenery.

It was rather surprising considering her usually unimpressed demeanour.

“Lara, don’t lean out the window.”

“...Ok.”

Every now and then she’ll start leaning forwards before Roxy tells her to sit back down.

But she still places her head out the window to look around.

I’m worried that she’ll suddenly fall out, but Leo is holding onto her clothes so she should be fine.

“...Mama, when we get closer, there are colours everywhere.”

“Milishion is home to many famous designers and they create many kinds of clothes aimed towards commoners, everybody here likes to dress up.”

“Even though it’s winter, there’s no snow, it’s not even cold.”

“Around here, snow doesn’t fall that often.

And when the season comes around, it rains heavily.

But that huge tower keeps it at a fixed level so the city never floods.”

Hearing Roxy explain things to Lara like that is quite calming.

Seeing the two like this just emphasises their resemblance.

She’s almost like a Mini-Roxy.

“Papa, I’m hungry.”

Chris is always happy on my lap.

It’s just, maybe because she’s scared of the outside, or she doesn’t like the shaking of the carriage, she’s been gripping my sleeve the whole time.

But if I pull it off, she’ll probably start crying.

“We’ll eat at great-grandmother’s house, so just wait till then ok?”

“K.”

My words go over smoothly with Chris.

Were it one of her mothers who said so, she would most likely have thrown a tantrum saying she wanted to eat right now.

Sylphy and the others might not like it, but when Chris is around it gives me a sense of superiority.

But when she grabs my hand like that and rubs it on her stomach, it makes me want to go buy her something.

Hey, you, stallkeep over there. Give me your most delicious apple, huh? You don't know which one is the most delicious? Then I guess I'll take them all. Don't worry. Whatever's left will be a gift to the Latrea house. Now I kinda want to say it.

Oh right, I brought a bunch of greeting gifts for the Latrea house, but I wonder if Claire will like any?

She won't say something like "I don't want such low class filth in my house," right? She wouldn't be so rude as to say it right?

While thinking that, I suddenly noticed that Lilia looked rather stiff.

"...Lilia-san, what's the matter?"

"I'm feeling somewhat uneasy."

"About what?"

"Claire-sama."

There's one major obstacle to overcome on this trip.

My grandmother, Claire Latrea.

That obstinate grandmother, when she heard that we'd be staying in Millis, immediately offered to house us.

I'm glad I haven't replied.

Just giving a greeting and not staying at the house was also an option.

When I think about the way she treated Norn, Aisha and Lilia in the past, it makes me uneasy.

But I'm not outright against the old lady's suggestion.

Claire has one fatal weakness, that's my adorable children. I don't think it would be impossible to spend a few days quietly.

So that said, first we should just go check it out and say hello.

And if it seems like it won't work, we can just go stay at an inn.

We came to this conclusion at a family meeting.

Even so, Lilia was still called all kinds of things last time she was here.

So it's not unusual thinking that she might hear it again would make her uneasy

“Claire-san may say those kinds of things, but she is thinking of us. Her thinking may be somewhat inflexible though... But if it comes down to it, you can always just stay behind me.”

“No, it's not about me.”

Lilia's gaze moves towards Roxy and Lara.

Right this time, Roxy and Lara, in other words, Magic race descendants, are coming.

And Norn also married someone from a Magic race.

And I've also brought all three of my wives this time.

And Claire is an adherent Millis believer from the Demon expulsion faction.

She had previously said that she wouldn't interfere but that was years ago.

People tend to forget small promises over time.

Of course, Roxy has already taken that into consideration.

During the family meeting she had said “There's no problem”.

“Lara and Lily may have a somewhat hard time with it, but they already know to some extent that Demons living among humans get that kind of treatment.”

Is what she said.

Norn is also prepared for anything she might say.

I'm not worried about any name calling there might be, but I'm scared that if she says something that upsets Lara that she'll do something weird.

I'm scared of her pranks.

Her victims have no limits.

“It will be fine Lilia-san.”

Roxy said that.

“If it’s not, then we just won’t go in at all.”

“Is that the case?”

I also have my doubts.

It’s not that I don’t trust Claire.

She did invite us after all.

I think inviting us over just to insult us would be against noble etiquette. Although I don’t know what kind of etiquette they follow in Millis.

But I still don’t think they’d invite us over from such a long distance away just to kick us out.

It’s just that, although it goes against common sense, you don’t know what someone might do when something they don’t like is right in front of them.

“...”

Zenith grabbed Lilia’s hand.

She didn’t say anything, but the meaning was conveyed.

I tapped on Lara’s shoulder.

“Obaa-chan what was that?”

Lara looked at me like it was a bother and then at Zenith, and then back at me and said:

“...Great-grandmother just worries a lot, it’ll be fine, she says.”

“Thanks.”

For once she actually passed on the message.

Well if that’s what Zenith says, then surely it will be fine.

Part 4

The reception at the manor was welcoming.

The maid was full of smiles and the butler was polite.

At the very least it was more welcoming than the reception I received last time I came to Milishion.

After they took our bags we were guided to Claire's room.

"I thank you for the long journey."

Once Claire saw us, she said that still seated.

Still seated.

Though I won't say her attitude was poor. She's the master of the house after all.

"Not at all, we only just left."

"Of course. Though I'm still having trouble wrapping my head around it..."

Claire pressed her fingers against her temples and looked like she wanted to say something, but she decided against it.

It was probably the fact that I use teleportation magic as if I own it.

"I'll introduce my family."

"Yes. As you see fit."

They all line up.

The children, three wives and Norn and Aisha.

Today Aisha isn't in the maid outfit, but a lovely dress.

At first glance, she could be mistaken for the eldest daughter.

Lilia is the same, but she already moved with Zenith to another room.

"Mary."

"Yes Madam."

Claire gave the order to the maid beside her and put out her hand.

The maid took hold of her hand and slowly helped her to her feet then handed her her walking stick.

She looked rather fragile leaning on her walking stick.

She had none of the fortitude she had previously.

It seems the reason she didn't stand when we walked in wasn't her pride.

"Are you unwell?"

"I'm getting old after all."

"You couldn't possibly be so old that your legs would weaken to such an extent..."

She's might be old enough to be called great-grandmother, but both I, and my kids were all born quite early.

I wouldn't go out of my way to ask her age, but since Zenith is about 40, she should be around 60, 70 at most.

"Would you like me to attempt healing magic?"

"No need. You're an outstanding magician, but this is Milishion and I am a noble."

Meaning that this is something that can't be healed with healing magic.

Well if she says it's fine then I won't press it, but I'm somewhat uneasy seeing her like this.

"Rather than your concern, I'd like continue with the introductions."

"That's true."

Well then I guess I should start.

First is Sylphy, Roxy and Eris.

The three wives.

"This is Sylphy. The first wife I married. The house is normally left under her supervision."

"I'm Sylphiette. I thank you for today's invitation. I look forward to staying with you."

As expected of Sylphy, you can see the elegance from her experience with greetings.

Nobody would ever guess that she grew up in the Fittoa countryside.

“This is Roxy. She is from the Migurd Race, a Magic Race, and although she looks as such, she’s older than me. She’s currently a teacher at the Magic University.”

“I’m Roxy. I’m sure you have some thoughts about my race, but still, I look forward to staying with you these next few days.”

When I introduced Roxy as a Migurd, Claire didn’t even flinch.

This is the first time they’ve met, but she did already know about it.

I guess she doesn’t plan to comment on it for now.

“This is Eris. A Master of the Sword God School. She is a member of the Great Asuran Noble family Boreas and the little sister of the current head.”

“I-I’m Eris. It’s nice to meet you.”

Eris is somewhat flustered.

At the Asuran parties she’s always calm but it seems my grandmother makes her nervous.

“ ... ”

Claire doesn’t say anything.

She doesn’t seem to be planning to scold me for having three wives.

Next is the children.

“This is the Eldest daughter Lucy”

“I’m Lucy Greyrat! Great-grandmother, It is excellent to finally meet you! I am pleased to be staying with you for these next few days!”

Lucy gives greeting while gripping the edge of her skirt.

Claire’s face slackens a little.

Even though she’s strict with her grandchildren, she can’t help but find her great-grandchildren cute.

“The second daughter Lara.”

“...I’m Lara.”

Lara gives a bored greeting and her face says that it’s a pain.

Claire’s eyebrows knit back up.

It seems it has nothing to do with the fact that they’re her great-grandchildren.

“He’s the eldest son Ars.”

“I’m Ars! I’ll be eight years old soon! Pleased to meet you!”

That said, the only unsociable one is Lara.

The rest of them are all polite and Claire doesn’t seem to have any complaints.

After Ars, Sieg, Lily and Chris all gave their greeting normally.

“You two next.”

After I prompt them, Norn and Aisha step forward.

Together they gave what you could call an elegant bow.

Norn and of course Aisha.

“I’m Norn Sperdia. It’s been quite a while grandmother.”

“I’m Aisha. I thank you for the invitation today.”

They both give greetings you couldn’t offer complains about.

Claire, still leaning on her cane, pointed her chin at the two.

“Yes, it’s been quite a while, the two of you.”

Just that.

She didn’t ask anything about the fact that Norn was married.

Maybe she thought it would be better not to ask here.

In any case, there hasn’t been a negative atmosphere just yet.

Most likely because of the fluent greetings.

Good, goo... Aah, Lara is picking her nose.

I’ll have to tell her off for that later.

“This is Claire Latrea. She’s your great-grandmother. We’ll be staying with her for around 10 days so be pollite.”

After I say that, Claire gives a slight bow.

It’s filled with elegance as always.

I’d love for the children to learn from her.

“I am Claire. I am here to welcome you in place of the Manor’s master. Please instruct the maids and butlers as you wish. You might find the difference in culture somewhat unpleasant, but please treat this house as if it was your own.”

“I thank you for your kindness. Everyone give your thanks.”

“Thank you very much! We look forward to staying with you.”

The children all bowed at once and Claire sat back down quite pleased.

Good work.

And so, our family vacation in Milishion began.

Part 5

“Rudeus-san, I have something I wish to talk to you about. Do you think you could remain behind?”

Is what I thought, but right as I was about to leave the room, I was called for.

I told the rest of the family to go on without me and stayed back.

Claire’s expression was, well, normal.

She didn’t seem mad.

“Please sit.”

“If you’ll excuse me.”

I sat down in the chair in front of her as told.

And as if there was some kind of switch in the chair, someone came out with tea.

They didn’t bring out tea for my family, but I guess we weren’t sitting down.

There weren’t enough seats after all.

“There’s no need to be so punctilious. I have no intentions of reprimanding you.”

It seems I’ve been seen though.

But considering how she was before, I hope she’ll overlook me being somewhat wary.

“Then what do you wish to talk about.”

“Simply idle conversation.”

I stole a look at her face.

There was nothing behind her expression and she simply sipped her tea.

The way she drank was captivating.

There’s probably some etiquette behind the way she drinks her tea.

I drank too while trying to mimic it.

They've used some good tea leaves.

"Speaking of tea... Lately Aisha has started raising a tea plant. I've brought a bag of the leaves with me, you should try it."

"Then we shall do that tomorrow."

"They're quite nice."

Aisha frequently changes what she's growing.

At one point she was growing some kind of herb, she even cooked with it, but she suddenly stopped.

I wonder why?

Ah, right. Chris was allergic to it wasn't she.

When the herbs started to become fragrant, her nose would start dripping.

Although healing Magic could fix the symptoms, it couldn't get rid of the allergy itself.

"Is Aisha still not married?"

"That seems to be the case."

"But it seems Norn did."

"Yes."

"What kind of person is he?"

I thought I had gotten past it, but it seems I can't avoid this topic.

But I'm glad Norn isn't here and she's asking me.

"He's of a Magic race."

I had already said so in the letter.

Thinking that it would be pointless to gloss over it, I said that.

"I am already aware. Although he doesn't seem to be here today. What kind of person is he?"

Oh, she meant that.

He did let his just married wife out by herself.

So she wants to know why he's not here.

“Their child is still small, so he's looking after the house. He told Norn that at least she should go and see her grandmother. It's definitely not because he's looking down on you or the Latrea house...”

Claire's eyebrows knitted together.

“I didn't ask why he's not here, I wish to know what kind of person he is.”

“Eh? Aah, Of course, he's a man worthy of trust. I'm sure I wrote this in my letter, He's an ally of the weak and doesn't tolerate hate. He has a strong sense of justice. Their idea of status is somewhat different from Humans' but he's the captain of an elite unit in a large scale army, so he has a somewhat high position in the village. Aah, on top of that, one of the 『Demon God Slaying Three Heroes』 Pergius-sama has his eyes on him. Also...”

“...That's enough.”

Claire stops me half way through and looks me in the eyes.

Did I say something bad?

“Just from what you've said just now, I can tell you've left Norn in the hands of someone you trust. And if that's the case, although I have some thoughts on the matter, it's not my place to say them.”

“I'm thankful you say that.”

“There's no need for that. I had already promised you that I wouldn't interfere.”

“So you did remember.”

“Of course. My back may be failing me, but my mind is as sharp as ever.”

That's good.

But I wonder why she was asking about that...

Because we're simply making idle conversation aren't we.

“In any case, Roxy-san is awfully small isn't she.”

“It’s a trait of the Migurd Race. They are much older than they look. Aah, but it’s forbidden to call her that to her face. She’s quite mindful of it.”

“I understand that. I am a woman of the Latrea house. My mouth may be foul, but I will not find fault with other’s appearances.”

I had half meant it as a joke, but apparently she took me seriously.

“And since the previous incident, I thought it ideal to learn more about the Magic and Beast Races.”

“I think that’s a fine goal. Whether you love or hate something, knowledge itself is important.”

Rather, it’s possible to end up hating something simply because it’s unknown to you.
It’s human nature to fear the unknown.
We’re a group that acts before learning.

“But, that Lara girl is a problem isn’t she.”

“...Yes.”

“Of course I’m not talking about the fact that she’s half Magic Race. It’s about her attitude towards someone she’s meeting for the first time.”

“I am sorry about that. I thought she’d be fine with at least a greeting, but lately she hasn’t been doing as she’s told.”

“...I won’t say too much about it. But it’s my outlook that strict discipline is appropriate where necessary.”

She was somewhat roundabout when saying it, but she’s probably telling me that physical punishment would be necessary.

Well that are times when that might be better.

It’s just that Lara is already quite experienced with that.

Eris is in charge of spankings after all.

She may look wild, but Eris is quite calculating

“You should understand why I say so.”

“For the future.”

“Exactly. A first impression is extremely important, it can change someone’s mental image of you. So you don’t exhaust their initial good will, and to avoid dissatisfaction down the line”

It’s starting to sound like a lecture.

But somehow it seems like Claire is enjoying herself.

“But her mother, Roxy-san despite the fact that she’s from a Magic race, she seems to be well aware.”

“How so?”

“When standing next to the legal wife Sylphy-san, she was always a step back. Her reserved greeting was also good. Her attitude displays that she knows her position.”

So it was about that.

I have no intention of labelling them as legal and secondary or numbering them...

No, that’s not it.

The problem is that Roxy is thinking like that in the first place.

“Eris-san... is a soldier after all, so her attitude can’t be helped.”

“I’m glad you think as such.”

“ ... ”

Claire looks like she’s about to give another lecture.

I’d appreciate it if she didn’t say too much.

Eris is trying her best after all.

“In any case Rudeus-san.”

“Yes?”

“I thank you for bringing them along.”

Claire said that as she bowed her head.

I won't ask who.

It’s not Norn or Aisha or Roxy.

It’s no one in particular.

It's everyone.

At the same time I realised her meaning, I understood.

That I was a bit too on guard.

That I should have looked at this more lightly, like a trip to grandma's house.

And so, our family vacation in Millis began.

Chapter 15

Ars's Millis Tour

Part 1

Ars was bored so he decided that he wanted to walk around town alone.

When he first got here, what first caught his eye were the numerous towers.

According to White Mama, they're huge Magic Tools, and it's because of them that the city has remained peaceful for so many years.

After that was the shining silver building.

According to Red Mama, that's the Adventurers Guild HQ, and most adventurers will visit it at least once.

He absolutely wanted to go to those two.

Of course, if he told his father, he would take him there.

Just today, after he said he wanted to see the sparkly gold building, he took the smiling Ars along with him.

But once they were inside, he didn't let Ars walk around freely.

After they went in, Ars was running all around with curiosity in his eyes, but his father threw all kinds of limitations at him, "You can't touch that," "You can't go there."

Honestly, Ars thought they were too restricting, and boring.

But what Ars didn't know was that the Millis Church was already very considerate of Rudeus.

The Millis Cathedral, especially the Inner Sanctum, are places only those with special permission may enter.

Under no normal circumstances would they allow rowdy children to enter.

But Ars was still a child.

He thought that as long as he asked to go to the the tower or the silver building, he'd be able to go.

But he realised that his movements would be restricted like today.

That's all he thought.

And so, when his father and the others left for the Inner Sanctum with the guards and the woman with the big chest,

He and the other children were told to play in the gardens until they came back, he saw his chance.

(Let's see how close I can get to the silver building and the tower.)

Thinking about it, his entire life had been restricted by his parents.

"Don't go there," "Don't walk around town alone."

Whenever he went out, he was always with Aisha or Leo.

Since he was little, he had readily obeyed, and even now he didn't intend to oppose.

Although he didn't completely understand the intention of his mothers, even though he was a child, he knew it was to teach and protect him.

He knew that it was dangerous to go outside, and that he shouldn't go alone.

He didn't necessarily hate having to go together with Aisha.

But even so.

Sometimes he just felt like he wanted to go somewhere without someone watching him.

"Hey, Lara-nee, let's slip out. You wanna go take a look at the silver building and the tower?"

And so the one Ars chose to invite was Lara.

For a change, Lara was alone today.

Leo was with the Guardian beast of the girl they called Miko, the Snowy Owl, and had left Lara behind.

And so Lara was also thinking that this was her chance.

Lara and Leo have always been close.

And even now, she had never disliked that.

But he followed her everywhere, and was always warning her about her actions, so lately she had been thinking that it was a little irritating.

So when she heard Ars' invitation, the edges of her mouth raised just a tad and she nodded.

"I thought that too."

And so the two began to put their plan into action behind Aisha's back.

They timed their escape for when Chris shouted "Papa's gone!" and started crying and they moved to a bush, running from shadow to shadow towards the exit.

"Hey, where are you two going?"

And the one who had spotted them was Sieg.

"Shhh, we're just going out to play a little."

"They'll get mad at you if you go outside."

"I know that you've been sneaking out the back by yourself lately."

"I-I did not..."

Ars knew.

Sieg was always going out by himself.

But he didn't know why he wasn't being scolded for going out by himself.

Ars thought that because he never saw him leaving with Aisha or Leo.

And so he was a little annoyed that his little brother was the only one allowed out alone.

In actual fact, Sieg wasn't alone.

Sieg, and of course Ars didn't know, that when he sneaks out of the house, a Rudo Mercenary is always secretly guarding him.

Of course, under the orders of the worrywart Rudeus.

“So if you want me to stay quiet, so will you.”

“...Ok.”

“We'll be fine, we're only going to the silver building and that huge tower to take a look.”

“Eh, you're going to the adventurers guild?”

Hearing him say silver building, Sieg's eye's shone.

He had heard many a heroic tale from Alek.

And many of them ended up at the Adventurers HQ so he had an extraordinary curiosity.

“Yeah.”

“Then, I want to go too!”

And so Ars and the other's left the Millis cathedral.

With mischievous hearts and full of curiosity.

Part 2

Ars, with Sieg and Lara in tow, headed towards the town.

The architecture was completely different to that of Sharia's, and was filled with all kinds of houses and buildings with odd shapes; it set Ars's heart on fire.

They had seen a lot of it in the carriage ride here, but there was something different about seeing on your own two feet.

Just having the pavement under you is a big change.

Even walking around a new city is exciting by itself.

A group consisting entirely of children, especially Sieg with his green hair, stood out, but they didn't mind it.

They had gotten quite used to those gazes in Sharia.

"Lara-nee, you have to walk forward. It's dangerous."

"K."

Lara responded, but kept looking around with sparkling eyes.

She was even more entranced than Ars at the tidy city.

"Hey, do you think we should have invited Lucy-nee? If we get separated, she'll get mad at us."

"If we had told her where we were going, she would have stopped us."

Sieg was always quite a coward.

And even though he'd been training by himself and gotten quite good with a sword, Ars still couldn't figure out why he was still scared of everything.

"Ahh Lara-nee! What's that!?"

What Ars was pointing at was a strange work of art.

It was a green sculpture in the shape of an owl.

It looked somewhat similar to the white bird they had seen, but it was obviously artificial and a little ominous.

Lara looked at it and answered with confidence:

“...That’s a fountain.”

“There’s no way someone would make a fountain that looks like that.”

“But it’s a fountain.”

“Eeh... That can't be right...”

But just as Ars went to inspect it, water squirted out of its mouth.

“Aah, It really is a fountain! Amazing! How did you know!?”

“I saw one similar at Juli-san’s place.”

That was one of Rudeus’s 『Byproducts』 The Merlion wind fountain.

It was based on the Miko’s guardian beast Nurse and was presented to her upon its completion.

That said, putting something like that in the Church’s Headquarters would be troublesome, But because of it’s stuffed animal like qualities, the Miko complained that she wanted it close by, and so it was installed near the Church for the townspeople to enjoy.

“Ohh.”

Seeing Ars and Sieg’s gazes of interest, Lara puffed her chest out with pride.

As the three continued their conversation, they crossed a bridge.

And as they did, the scenery around was quite different.

The buildings were smaller and there were more people.

You could even see people carrying swords or walking around armoured in large numbers.

The rugged hard faced people seemed to have increased.

They had crossed from the Sacred ward to the Adventurers ward.

“It got kinda normal.”

“Yeah.”

But it was a scene that they had already gotten used to in Sharia.

Although they could be called muscular and rugged, compared to the Rudo Mercenaries, they looked rather weak.

Not to mention Red Mama.

“Lara-nee, which way was the silver one?”

“Hm. This way.”

“Alright, let’s go!”

The exuberant Ars walked forward followed by an excited Sieg with a somewhat sleepy looking Lara behind them with a little smile on her face.

“Wow, amazing!”

“Aah!”

Once they arrived at the main street, the Adventurers Guild HQ immediately came into view.

It was a giant silver building placed right in the centre of the street. There was no way you could miss it.

“Ar-nii! Hurry up!”

Sieg ran forward in high spirits.

A complete 180 from his previous opposition.

No matter what he said, there was no way he could fight against the charm of the 『Adventurers Guild HQ』 That was the start of so many legends.

“Aah, wait!”

Ars and Lara, with anticipation in their face once more, chased after him.

They wanted to get a closer look as quick as possible.

Seeing the children suddenly start running, those around them suddenly thought “Danger”.

The result of children running was usually bumping into someone or getting run over by a carriage.

But they completely overturned the people's' assumptions and the three children skilfully weaved through the crowd of people.

And they even stayed to the side where the carriages didn't pass.

That was the result of daily training.

Part 3

“Woah~!”

After arriving at the staircase in front of the entrance, Sieg let out an excited shout.

It wasn't though they hadn't seen a building of this scale before.

The Magic University in Sharia was a structure of impressive stature.

But there was just something different about it.

The Adventurers guild HQ was silver and incredibly shiny.

The Magic University was filled with reds and browns, kind of like a potato.

“Ar-nii, it's the Adventurers Guild!”

“Yeah, it's the Adventurers Guild!”

“It's completely different from ours!”

“Ours is shoddy compared to this!”

“But this smell inside is the same.”

“Yeah, it does smell.”

Muttering some rude remarks, they walked through the gate.

Very quietly.

Some of the dim-witted adventurers liked to pick fights with children who walk into the guild.

That was something that Blue Mama had told them.

Ars was basically wishing for a fight, but if he started one after already sneaking out, Red Mama would get mad.

Red Mama is scary when she's angry. She'll spank your behind until it's bright red.

And if Sieg or Lara got hurt, Red Mama wouldn't be the only one angry.

Making Blue Mama or White Mama angry, the thought had Ars shaking in his boots.

But thinking that he might get to see Papa angry, made him kind of want to start a fight.

Up until now, Papa would always be complimenting or pampering them, rarely would he scold anyone.

They had never seen Papa truly angry before.

“Wow~”

The inside of the guild was just as splendid as the outside would suggest.

The inside felt amateurish but also composed, and there were a lot of desks.

The number of adventurers was also completely different to outside.

In the Magic City Sharia all the magicians seemed like beginners, and all the warriors and healers were quite skilled.

But here it was the opposite. The ones that looked like beginners were the warriors and healers but all the magicians looked experienced.

“Ars.”

Seeing that Ars was satisfied by the scenery in front of him, Lara called out from behind.

“There are 3 more floors.”

Lara pointed at the information board in front of the stairs.

It outlined the purposes of each of the floors.

The first floor was a reception and a meeting place, the second floor was a store where you could buy equipment and raw materials directly from the guild, the third floor was restaurant, and the fourth floor was a guild room for large scale events and meetings.

“Let’s go up!”

But as Ars began walking towards the stairs, a shadow was cast over them.

When he turned around, a woman caked in makeup with huge breasts was standing there.

“This isn’t a playground. What’d you come here for?”

“S-Sightseeing! We’ve come from Ranoa Kingdom...”

The reason he managed to reply right away, was because his Papa had told he what to say.

“Your parents?”

“I-it’s just us right now.”

“Right... Then, how about I guide you around? Although I may not look it, I’m a staff member here. Today my shift ended in the morning, so how about it?”

After she said that, she showed them the crest on her shoulder.

It was the same one as the people from the reception.

“T-then please do.”

Ars’s heart was pounding.

Ars loved voluptuous breasts.

Of course, he didn’t hate small ones, but he liked big ones better.

The woman in front of them was about the same level as Aisha, which was a size sufficient to cause Ars’s heart to pound.

“Alright then, leave it to me. Ok? The first floor, as you can see, is the reception area.”

The woman began explaining all kinds of things with a friendly smile.

The three of them followed her around on their tour of the Adventurers Guild HQ.

First floor, second floor, third floor, fourth floor...

The woman guided them around so politely that you would never imagine she was dealing with children.

They had intended to move around freely, but they ended up with a guide.

They had strayed from their plans, but everything they saw was fresh.

Especially the guild room which Sharia’s guild hall didn’t have. It was so lavishly designed that you wouldn’t imagine it belonged to adventurers.

“And that’s the end. Did you have fun?”

Right after she was done, she turned towards Ars and said that.

“Yes, it was interesting! Thank you very much!”

“You don’t need to thank me... So what are you doing after this? Are you going to meet your mum and dad?”

“N-no...”

“Hmm. Then would you like me to walk you home?”

“That’s fine. We’ll go home by ourselves!”

He turned her down because they had yet to see the tower.

He lied to her, but if they started walking to a different part of the town, she would surely notice.

There was no way they could go home without completing their objectives.

And so, Ars and the others left the Adventurers Guild.

Their plans had changed slightly but it turned out alright in the end.

“Now then, on to the next one!”

Ars was pointing not just at the tower, but the sun which had passed noon was beginning to fall.

Part 4

They saw all kinds of things on their way to the tower.

A complex aqueduct, on top of which were small boats.

A carriage carrying large amount of what looked like monster materials.

And protecting it was a crowd of adventurers.

They would shout in excitement whenever something caught their interest and were enjoying their field trip quite thoroughly.

But because of all their dawdling, the tower which should have been quite close, was still surprisingly far.

By the time they had arrived there, it was already dusk.

“Wow~, it’s huge...”

Seeing the tower at night from this close up was overwhelming for them.

It was so thick that it took them several minutes to circle the whole thing, and it was so tall you couldn’t see the top.

And when you looked at it close up, you could see faint symbols carved on the whole thing.

Although the Magic Tool wasn’t comprised of the whole tower, to protect the Magic Tool on the inside, large scale barrier magic was carved around the tower.

Of course, Ars didn’t know that.

He simply thought that Lily would have liked to see this kind of thing.

“Ar-nii, it seems they won't let us inside after all.”

“I see. Well I guess it can’t be helped.”

Although Sieg had managed to find the entrance, there were two soldiers guarding it, it seemed no one was allowed inside.

That's a matter of course.

Ars did want to see the scenery from the top of the tower, but since it seemed impossible, he had the judgement to give up there.

“Haa... Well then, let's head home!”

“Yeah!”

“K!”

Ars gave a triumphant shout and began to walk back so Lara and Sieg followed.

“Lara-nee, it was so much fun!”

“Yeah. It was fun. That dragon head mounted in the guild room, I want one too.”

“Alright, when I get bigger I'll get one for you.”

“I'll help too.”

They were delighted to see all kinds of things they wouldn't normally have.

Sieg was especially excited and had been continuously been talking at Lara.

But while they were walking Ars was suddenly assaulted with unease.

Could it be.

No, it can't...

“Hey, Ar-nii, remember that giant sword mounted on the wall in the Adventurers Guild, do you know what it is?”

“No?”

“It was one of the 48 Magic Swords.”

“You sure know a lot.”

“It was being used as a decoration, so it was probably a fake, Alek-san once drew a picture for me.”

“Hmph...”

“Aah, wait up!”

Ars gave Sieg a rude reply and walked faster.

Sieg was confused at Ars's sudden silence but kept talking to Lara.

Lara was slightly curious about Ars's demeanour but she didn't do anything about it and just kept listening to Sieg.

The three continued to walk.

They frequently trained so no one complained that they were tired or their feet hurt. But seeing Ars walk in front of him silently, Sieg inevitably got quieter.

Before long he stopped talking entirely and the three walked in silence. Slowly through the night.

And so, the day ended.

Part 5

Several minutes after the sun had set.

The three were standing in a dark alley.

There were no traces of people in the silence around them

“Hey, Ar-nii, how much farther is it?”

“...How should I know.”

Ars didn't intend for it to turn out like this.

It's not like he didn't think of the trip home.

On the way there they would aim for the huge tower, and on the way back they would aim for the shiny gold building.

It's a golden building after all.

It stands out from quite a distance, and they would just be returning along the path they had already come.

That's what he had thought.

But the second the sun began to set, everything was dyed yellow.

And the long shadows cast by the evening sun, erased any traces of the path they walked.

The fact that they had stopped to look at all kinds of things on the way there also had a part to play.

“What do you mean you don't—“

“Shut up! I don't know what I don't know!”

Ars yelled at him and Sieg shook a little.

Hearing his reliable brother yell at him, Sieg realised just how serious the situation was, and tears started to seep out of the corner of his eyes.

He may have started training with Alek, but he was still a young child.

He was also normally a good kid and wasn't used to being yelled at.

“Ars.”

Lara quietly said that to Ars.

Ars looked behind him.

He saw Sieg with tears in his eyes and the still expressionless Lara.

But in Lara’s eyes he could see a small amount of anger.

“...I’m sorry. Lara-nee, we’re lost.”

“Yup.”

“Do you know how to get back?”

“...I don’t.”

Lara feebly shook her head.

Lara always looked like nothing could faze her, but now she had none of her usual arrogance.

Ars felt somewhat hopeless seeing her like that.

But he didn’t cry, nor did he complain, instead he clenched his fist.

“E-Everything will be fine! Leave it to me!”

This was something he started.

So he had to fix it himself.

That’s what he thought.

Ars took Lara and Sieg’s hand and gripped them tightly.

To relieve the other two, he mustered up his non-existent wisdom, and thought.

Blue Mama had once said:

When you’re in trouble, don’t panic. First think of what you can do.

“Umm... Right, when we left the big street, there were people there, we’ll just ask them how to get there. The shiny gold building isn’t that far, they should know where it is.”

It had only just turned night.

When they left main street, there were still plenty of people, it should be easy to ask one of them.

Blue Mama had also said this:

If you don't know something, don't be afraid to ask someone.

“...What if the people are mean and don't tell us?”

Ars didn't know how to refute Sieg's negative declaration.

He didn't think they wouldn't know, but he couldn't say the possibility of someone not telling them was zero.

Continuing Blue Mama's previous statement:

But it's not as if people will tell you anything you ask, there's a possibility they might lie, so you have to be careful.

“If that happens... Ah, right! Papa told us “If you ever get lost in the city, just go find a church, if you throw out uncle Cliff's name they'll help you out! Priests can't lie to us right?”

“Ah... That's right!”

A priest still could lie to them,

But the image that came to his mind was Clive's father, Cliff.

And although they had only met a few times, in his mind Cliff was a person who would never lie.

“Well then, let's go home.”

“It'll be fine so don't cry. Cheddar Man doesn't cry.”

“I-I'm not crying.”

Strength returned to Sieg's face, and Ars looked like he had a bit more energy.

And Lara who now looked much livelier, gave an encouraging smile.

“Alright.”

So first is main street or a church.

There were no people around them, but if they ran into anyone on the way, they could just ask them.

That much would be simple.

But along with that thought, Ars had a different sense of unease.

Not only had he gone and gotten lost, he had gotten Lara and Sieg dragged along with him.

His mothers would definitely be disappointed.

Red Mama would be especially angry.

Even Blue Mama and White Mama would.

Normally Aisha would cover for them and try to soften the blow, but this time they had snuck out under Aisha's watch.

There was no way she'd be on their side.

"Eeh..."

"Ars, are you crying?"

Lara peeked in front of Ars's face.

Ars wiped the tears off his face with his sleeve.

"I-I'm not crying. There's just some dirt in my eye! Lara-nee, don't go anywhere! If we get separated here, it's over!"

"...K, got it. You sure are reliable."

"Stop it. It's my fault this happened."

"It's my fault too."

Lara pat him on the head and he reddened slightly before facing forward.

They quickly started walking.

Staying in the gloomy empty alley, really was about to make him cry.

There was no doubt that they were going to get scolded.

He had prepared himself for that.

Aisha would probably be mad at him too, but he remembered to make sure to apologise.

And the second they turned the corner.

“Whoops.”

They ran into a woman.

One with a voluptuous chest.

Seeing a chest of familiar size, Ars reflexively made a sound.

“Aah...”

“Hmm? You’re the kid...”

It was the woman who had guided them around the Adventurers Guild HQ that afternoon.

“O-Onee-san? Why?”

“Huh? Why else. I’m heading home after work, my house is this way after all. What about you? It’s already dark, if you don’t get home your parents will get mad.”

Ars was relieved.

Because someone they knew had appeared.

Hell is merciful... was a phrase that Ars didn’t know, but for now their future looked better.

“Um, we got lost. Do you know where the main street, no a church or the shiny gold building is?”

“Shiny gold, do you mean the cathedral?”

“Right, that one! Cathedral!”

“Of course I know. There’s no one who lives in this city that wouldn’t.”

Ars and Sieg looked at each other.

But then Ars calmed his expression and cleared his throat.

He had lessons from White Mama on how to act when asking people for something.

“Um, do you think you could guide us there? I’m sure our father would reward you.”

“...Silly, lost children shouldn’t be so formal. Come on, follow me.”

Ars remembered.

White Mama once said:

Connections between people are important.

Someone who you might have only just met, could end up coming to your aid when you need it.

Surely she was talking about this.

Ars matured just a little that day.

Part 6

“We’re here.”

And so the three of them had arrived at their destination under the guidance of the woman.

“Eeh?”

Is what they had thought.

The scene in front of them was that of a dark alley.

There wasn’t a single trace of anyone around them, the walls were scrawled with obscenities and the trash covered floor gave an overwhelming odour.

No matter how dark it was, he could tell there was no shiny gold building around them.

“Umm, Where? Eeh?”

“That’s no good. Didn’t your parents tell you not to follow around people you don’t know?”

Hearing footsteps suddenly surround them, Ars was shaking.

They were surrounded by vulgar laughs and a number of men.

Ars could tell that they were planning on kidnapping them.

And even though he had realised that, his thoughts were still a mess.

The woman was a staff member at the Adventurers Guild and had kindly guided them around.

So why...

She had said she had gotten off work, but she said the same thing at noon...

“You lied about working at the guild!”

“I didn’t lie to you. This is a side job. Just a little bit of extra money. There are lots of kids like you in this city. Orphans who want to become adventurers and come to the guild but

leave without joining. And once they leave, if they can't make it back home before dark, this is what happens.”

“Dammit!”

Ars immediately picked up a broken stick from the ground and took a stance to protect his brother and sister.

“Ar-nii...”

Sieg was shaking while holding onto Ars's sleeve.

Lara was expressionless as always, but she looked somewhat pale.

He couldn't even protect the two of them.

It was his fault it ended up like this.

It was his mistaken judgement.

But now, what could he do right now?

What had his mothers told him... What... What...!?

“ANYONE! IS ANYONE HERE! WE'RE BEING KIDNAPPED! PLEASE HELP!”

Ars shouted.

If anything happens, before you think about fighting, look for help.

That was what Blue Mama had said, or was it White Mama?

Or maybe Aisha.

No, it was probably something his Papa had said.

“Cry and scream all you want, no one's coming.”

Ars could tell that was the case and immediately moved to his next line of thinking.

What he remembered next, was something Red Mama taught him.

『First, carefully observe the enemy』

Ars remained on guard and calmly looked around.

The alley was a dead end. There one person in front of him and two behind him. They all had swords.

But compared to Red Mama, they were weaklings.

They had no presence nor bloodthirst.

They were at a level common in Sharia.

They were small fry that would piss themselves and run in front of Red Mama.

All he had on hand was a stick that looked like it would break after one hit, but he had already been trained in unarmed combat and he could somewhat use magic.

If he did as he practiced, he could surely win.

Surely, probably, it will be fine, probably.

“Ar-nii, are you going to fight...? I-I’ll fight t-to.”

“You stay back Sieg!”

Although that’s what he said, Ars’s knees were shaking.

The stick in his hands was shaking, his breathing was rough and he looked like he was about to burst into tears.

He was about to fight three adults in pure darkness.

And on top of that, he had to protect his brother and sister.

That kind of pressure was a first for Ars.

“Ooooh, what a brave big brother. But there’s no way you can win you know? Although these guys are ex-adventurers, their skills are the real deal.”

“Shut up! Don’t you touch them!”

“Haa, don’t hurt them too much. These kids come from somewhere high up, so we’ll get quite the ransom for them.”

The two responded with a “Yes Ma’am,” and charged at them.

Ars felt his stomach tighten,

And as he turned around and put as much mana into his fist as possible—

Clap Clap Clap

When something broke the silence.

It was the sound of clapping.

It came from behind the two men encircling them, and everyone stopped moving.

At the same time, a white lump jumped over the two men.

After it did a quick once around of the situation, it sniffed Lara to make sure she wasn't injured, and turned to the men and snarled.

“GRRRRRRR...”

“LEO!”

It was Leo.

But the once clapping wasn't him.

Because he didn't have hands.

“Alright. That's enough~”

It was a familiar voice.

A voice so familiar there wasn't a day that went by without it.

With her dazzling brown hair and a fang¹ that fit her, she walked out of the darkness.

Dressed in a maid outfit, protruding her huge chest, holding a lantern.

“Aisha-nee!”

Ars called out her name.

She wasn't his sister.

She wasn't his sister, but if he called her aunt, she would get angry.

“Taadaa Ars-kun, I've come to save you.”

Seeing her carefree smile, Ars was about to cry.

But Ars and the others weren't the only ones relieved.

Seeing that their opponent coming from the darkness was a big dog and a maid the men became confident again.

“Bitch, who’s maid are you...”

“The Greyrat house.

Aah, around here it would be better to say the Latrea house.

The family of Carlyle Latrea who has long served the Holy Knights. You’ve heard of them right?”

The Holy Knights.

Hearing that name, the men were suddenly flustered.

The men weren’t well versed in the names of nobles,

But they had at least heard of the Holy Knights.

They were famous among believers, they were the private army of the Millis Church.

“I would give up on holding those kids for ransom. It won’t end well for you.”

“I-If I was afraid of the Holy Knights, how could I go on kidnapping.”

There was no way they weren’t afraid.

They had heard rumours of how the Church treated heretics.

They would tie your hands and feet up and from your feet up, one by one, slowly smash every bone in your body.

Anyone else would see it as nothing but an act of sadism.

But they believed from the bottom of their hearts that what they were doing was good. And in response to your screams of pain all they would tell you is: “If you truly wish for salvation from the bottom of your heart, God will surely hear you. You may soon be by his side, rejoice,” while giving you a smile that could relieve you from the bottom of your heart. Of course, it was just a false rumour, but the men believed it.

“It’s fine if you’re not scared of the Holy Knights... But how about the Rudo Mercenaries? Their super beautiful financial advisor will chase you to the depths of hell, it’s much scarier than dying.”

“W-Why would the Rudo Mercenaries get involved?”

“Of course, because the Rudo Mercenaries top dog is those kids’ father.”

The men suddenly looked startled and looked at the kids.

“Onii-cha... Whoops, Rudo Mercenary Chief, Rudeus Greyrat.

Right Hand of the Dragon God, influential to many nations and a master mage.

He’s normally quite gentle, and would just keep talking even if you poured liquor over his head at a party.

But he treasures his family quite highly, if he found out that his children were attacked, what would he do I wonder...?”

“Y-You’re just making it up.”

“Do you really think that? I’m starting to get tired of trying to convince you.”

“Even if i’m wrong, if I take you out here, it makes no difference.”

“Really now. Leo, do it.”

At that command, the white beast moved like a storm.

First he went to the man in front of him bit his leg and shook his head.

The man’s leg snapped with a clean sound and Leo let go.

The man spun through the air and slammed into a wall.

And by the time the other man had turned towards that sound, it was too late.

He didn’t even have time to draw the sword on his back before Leo bit his hand, after a few snapping sounds he let go and bit at his face, then after being shaken around he fainted and was thrown at the wall.

“Hii...”

The woman didn’t get away.

As she was trying to climb the wall to escape Leo bit at her behind and threw her at the wall like the other two and she passed out.

“ ... ”

Ars watched the whole thing dumbfounded.

On top of that, Leo probably held back.

With that much power, he could have easily bit their heads off.

But he didn't.

He had gripped them between his teeth, broke their bones, and threw them into a wall knocking them out.

The opponents that Ars had feared.

“Is everyone alright? You're not hurt?”

Aisha completely ignored the passed out kidnappers.

She crouched in front of Ars and the others as if nothing had happened and checked them for wounds.

“N-No. We're fine.”

“Really? Then let's head home.”

Ars didn't know what was going on but he nodded, and Aisha flashed her tooth and smiled.

Part 7

Along the dark path.

The three were on Leo following Aisha and her lantern home.

The kidnappers had already been taken care of, after Aisha blew some kind of dog whistle, the Rudo Mercenaries came running and took them to the authorities.

Ars thought they would be scolded on the way home.

Why did you leave all by yourself?

Why did you get Lara and Sieg involved?

Aisha rarely got angry.

No matter how mischievous Ars was or how much trouble he caused for others, she never got angry.

She would always cover for him saying it couldn't be helped.

She would always kindly tell him not to do it again and to learn from his mistakes.

But this time, they were only a step away from disaster.

And they had ignored Aisha who was always looking after them to do so.

Aisha had come to search for them, but Mama or Papa probably got mad at her.

She was told to look after the kids until everyone came back, but they ended up disappearing.

And having someone you're watching over running away would also make you angry, no matter how gentle Aisha is, even she would be annoyed.

Although Ars didn't think that far through, he could still guess that Aisha would be angry at them for what they did.

“Aisha-nee... Sorry.”

And so, Ars apologised.

“Hmm? For what?”

“I left without telling you, and put everybody in danger...”

“Eeh? What are you talking about?”

But Aisha laughed and pat his head.

He couldn't feel the slightest bit of anger from her actions.

Ars wondered if she had forgiven them.

But why?

“We're here.”

“...!”

Aisha said that and Ars realised they had arrived at the gate to the Latrea house.

In front of the manor, Ars swallowed in anticipation.

Aisha may have forgiven them.

But his mothers would definitely be angry.

They had taught him to protect his siblings.

And this time he had gone against that.

He should at least be prepared for Red Mama's spanking.

Even Papa might be angry.

“Thanks for your work.”

Aisha said that to the gatekeepers and they followed her through the kitchen's back door.

They walked down a hallway and opened up a door to a room filled with their family.

In there was:

Their three mothers, two grandmothers, a blonde aunt, a stone faced great-grandmother and their Papa.

“We have returned.”

Aisha bowed and the family looked at the three of them.

They were surely about to get scolded.

The first would probably be Red Mama.

Red Mama was always first.

That's what Ars thought.

"Oh, welcome home, you sure took your time."

But Red Mama simply gave them a light answer.

"Was the Adventurers Guild fun?"

Red Mama's tone was soft.

"But you shouldn't have come home so late. Even if you were with Aisha and Leo, it's dangerous at night."

"That's correct. Even though you were with them, you shouldn't be fluffing about outside at night. Why didn't you return sooner?"

White Mama and Lilia's words were somewhat harsh but they weren't angry.

Norn-nee and Claire didn't say anything but their gazes said that they agreed.

"Don't worry too much, although they are a little late, we haven't even had dinner yet. More importantly, did you see anything interesting?"

Papa, as always was sweet.

Zenith-Baachan was silent as always, but she didn't look like she was criticising them.

Zenith-Baachan was like that, but when she's mad you can just tell.

"Umm..."

Ars couldn't tell what was going on and was troubled on how to answer.

There was a noticeable silence.

"In the Adventurers Guild's guild room, there was a Dragon's head on the wall."

Lara suddenly said that.

Judging from her expression, it seemed like she knew the answer.
she probably heard it from Leo.

“Aah, Papa, did you know, in the Adventurers Guild, they had a Magic Sword!”

After that Sieg began talking about the Adventurers Guild with a happy look on his face.
The previous dilemma had probably already slipped from his mind.

“Let’s finish the story later. We’ll get Lucy and the others and have dinner.”

The atmosphere was calm and they went and had dinner.

Part 8

After dinner, Ars left the large dining room.

He returned to his own room and as if it was natural, he turned around and faced Aisha.

“Why?”

The first thing Ars did was ask that.

Why was no one angry at them.

Why did everyone know they went to the Adventurers Guild.

All those included.

And Aisha just gave a smile.

“Wanna know?”

“Yeah.”

Aisha changed from looking like she had just succeeded in a prank to a serious expression.

“I saw you when you three were trying to sneak out of the Cathedral’s courtyard.

You looked like you had lost to your boredom and were about to pull some kind of prank, but when I heard you say that you were going to the Adventurers Guild, I immediately followed.”

Ars could understand that.

Aisha had already seen through everything.

And on top of that, she didn’t meet up with them and let them do what they wanted.

Tailing them so that on the off chance that something happens, she can come out and save them.

“I didn’t think you’d go all the way to the magic tower though.”

She had always been protecting them.

Although she didn't intervene when they were lost and on the verge of tears...

"...Then when when you realised we were lost, why didn't you help us?"

"Hmm? Don't you already know that?"

Hearing her joke like tone, Ars clenched his teeth.

Of course Ars knew.

It was his fault they were in that situation.

He thought that because of his mothers' teachings, if something did happen, he'd be able to do something about it.

And even when he knew they were lost, he still didn't give up.

He mustered up his own wisdom and tried to figure something out.

It wasn't over.

And so Aisha continued to watch. It wasn't her turn to come out.

But in the end, when it came to a situation where they would be injured, she came out.

Ars made a mistake so she came to save them.

And because that woman didn't seem like a kidnapper, because she had kindly guided them around the guild, Aisha didn't act until the last moment.

He couldn't blame her.

Everything was his fault.

Aisha was still cleaning up after his mistakes.

"...Aisha-nee... I'm sorry."

"Anything else to say, do you know what you did wrong?"

"We snuck out without telling you..."

"No, that's not it."

Aisha's denial surprised Ars.

It was something unusual.

Aisha never really tried to teach Ars anything.

She always say "It can't be helped," and cleaned up the situation, but never said anything in regards to it.

But Aisha's face was the same as always with a smile full of composure.

"Ars-kun, you thought I was irritating and decided to go out by yourselves right?"

"I-I didn't think you were... irritating. Just a little... Aah, but I like you Aisha-nee."

"Really? Hehe, thanks. Hearing you say that, you're making me embarrassed."

Aisha put her hands on her cheeks and swayed side to side.

"In any case, you wanted to go to the Adventurers Guild without someone watching over you right?"

"Yeah."

"And you knew you shouldn't."

"Yes, but... Everyone would worry..."

"Of course, worrying everyone is bad."

"Yeah."

"But you never wanted to worry anyone on purpose right? You're not that mean of a kid."

Ars nodded.

He didn't think too much about it, but he never wanted to worry anyone.

"You thought that after you went to see the Adventurers Guild and the tower I'd just ask "Jeez, where have you been?" and you'd just look at Lara and Sieg and laugh "It's a secret." like nothing happened?"

It was exactly that.

He didn't have that clear an image, but a situation like that was Ars's ideal.

They would go out and enjoy themselves and return before they worried anyone.

They might have worried Aisha a little, but they would be right back and she'd say "So you were just over there," and give a sigh of relief.

"The fact that you couldn't do that is the problem."

Aisha said it straight out.

Ars had a goal.

To go to the Adventurers Guild without Aisha or Leo or anyone else.

She didn't care about the fact that they didn't want to go together, it was just part of the goal.

But if you set that as your goal, you have to complete it, is what she was saying.

“...Although you say that... Aisha-nee what would you have done?”

“Hmm. Even I'd have a hard time going to both the tower and the Adventurers Guild in that short amount of time. They're just too far apart. So I'd probably just go with the Adventurers Guild and save the tower for another day. Didn't you already know that you didn't have much time? So the second you heard our plans yesterday, you should have come up with a proper strategy.”

“You're right...”

“I would have also brought a weapon, and a tool to contact someone. So just in case I ran into something I couldn't handle myself, I could call someone to come help.”

Hearing it outlined so clearly, Ars realised what he did wrong.

Looking at it calmly, Ars really was careless.

It was too sudden and lacked thought.

Failing in that situation was a given.

At the same time he thought:

Aisha really is amazing.

“...I got it. Next time, I'll be more careful. So I don't worry anyone.”

“Yes yes. As long as you keep that in mind. But while you have to be careful, you can't be scared of failure. Because you'll never be able to do anything that way. Fail to your heart's content.”

“Eeh, but, if it ends up like today...”

“Don't worry! If you fail, I'll take care of it like today! Challenge yourself without fear.”

Aisha whacked her large chest.

Ars didn't really understand, he remembered how today felt and smiled at Aisha.

“Alright. I understand Aisha-nee! Thanks!”

“You’re very welcome! Aww, Ars-kun you’re so cute!”

Aisha said that and hugged Ars.

And while he was having his head pat while being stuffed into Aisha’s soft chest, Ars was earnestly thinking over the day.

Chapter 16

Roxy's Duty

Part 1

That day I was reading on a chair out in the garden.

Eris and Sieg were nearby doing practice swings.

Although I think it would be fine to give it a rest while they're on vacation

Ars was with them just before but Rudy's aunt Therese had invited him off somewhere.

They're probably eating sweets inside her room by now.

Well that's fine, but he's always been somewhat...

Whenever he's with with women with large chests, he always looks quite excited.

I feel his relations with women in the future will be harsh.

Lara has been wandering around the garden with Leo for a while now.

Probably plotting something again.

Her actions have been somewhat incomprehensible as of late...

That aside, Ars, Sieg, and Lara are all usually quiet around the house, so today should be quite peaceful.

Sylphy and Norn took Lucy and Clive on a trip to the Adventurers Guild.

They invited me along with them, but I turned them down.

I don't really want to have a child come up to me, tell me "I'm trying to make a party of adventurers around the same age," and invite me to join.

And in Millishion Magic races always stand out.

There was also Lilly and Chris to look after...

But they had already fallen asleep, so I was left without something to do for the first time in a while.

And being myself, I decided to read a book.

And lucky for me, there was quite an interesting book in the Latrea library.

The title was: 『Origins of Divine Attack Magic』

Its description of Resurrection Magic was quite interesting.

『During the Human-Demon Great War, the Demons utilised a certain magic to torment the Humans.

Resurrection Magic

A magic to revive and enslave the dead, now Skeletons, Wraiths, and Moving Armour type magic beasts are all that's left of this Forbidden Art.

Divine Attack Magic was birthed to combat Resurrection Magic. And during the First Human-Demon Great War the two continued to counter each other and evolved together. After that, Resurrection Magic was declared a Taboo and was lost, and Divine Attack Magic though it still exists today, is in decline.』

There weren't any detailed descriptions of any magic formations or chants, nor do I have any intention of attempting Resurrection Magic, but reading about it has tickled my curiosity.

Ancient magic battles.

How romantic...¹

“...Roxy-sama.”

“Yes?”

Someone called me from behind and I looked up from my book.

Standing there was a maid of the Latrea house.

I have a bad feeling about this.

“The madam... Claire-sama has called for you.”

Claire Latrea.

She is more or less my grandmother-in-law.

Although we should be around the same age...

For now, I won't show any displeasure, but if it has something to do with the Demon Expulsion faction, I'm sure that will change.

I wonder what she wants to say.

To be honest I want to run...

I snuck a glance at Eris.

“Oi, tuck your arms in more! Raise your chin!”

She's teaching swordplay with the same enthusiasm as always.

If it has something to do with my race, that's fine, but if it's something else...

Like if it's about the children's education.

But if I run she might end up calling on Eris.

Eris can't handle complex or subtle conversations.

If they say something she doesn't like, she'll end up hitting someone.

That's just what she's like.

She would be able to rebuke Claire, but then a fight would be unavoidable.

“I understand.”

This is just another duty as Rudeus's wife.

Part 2

Although I had gotten myself hyped up over it...

“ ... ”

Currently Claire is quietly drinking her tea.

And I, unable to say anything, am simply sitting in front of her.

For some reason Lillia and Zenith are here too, Lillia being in the same shoes as me.

Zenith is the same as always.

Honestly, it's suffocating.

There are also some sweets next to the tea but I can't reach for them.

They're some of my favourites, but I feel like if I try to grab one, I'll get told off.

“You'll ruin your dinner,” or something like that... I'm often having to tell Lara that.

It can't be a coincidence that both Lillia and I are here.

Although our husbands are different, we both have the same position that it wouldn't be an exaggeration to call 'mistress'.

And that's something that the Millis religion doesn't accept.

That said, I am prepared.

I have been somewhat spoilt as of late, but I have always been prepared for insensitive statements.

It seems Lillia feels the same way I do.

Or maybe she was already prepared for it far before I was.

In any case, I can consider it a silver lining that Eris wasn't called here.

“It seems Rudeus-san is out.”

Claire broke the silence.

She was the first one to talk since I entered.

“He went to deliver a gift to Cliff-san.”

“Work it is. Even though he’s on vacation with his family... He’s exactly like Carlyle in that aspect.”

Rudeus woke up early this morning and went with Elinalise to deliver 『The Doll』 to Cliff. But would it be ok to call that work...?

The Doll.

It was an Automaton designed to take care of Cliff.

I had already received an explanation regarding Anne, and I didn’t have any real opinion on her...

But even I feel this one is somewhat off putting.

After all, it looks exactly like Elinalise, even it’s behaviour and tone are identical, only the ears are short.

The appearance was apparently her idea.

Recently Cliff’s position has gotten quite high, he’s been quite popular with women and has even gotten a number of marriage proposals.

So she intends to use it as a form of pesticide.

They were planning to introduce it at Cliff’s wife, hiding the fact that she was an Elf. Elinalise had spent many months teaching it how to act like her.

That said, Elinalise probably had another use in mind for it.

She had complained that “It doesn’t have what it needs.”

Of course it’s not exactly like her to the last detail, but it really does look just like her, it’s unnerving.

Rudy had once made a doll of me, but I really couldn’t handle it if it moved.

If he had asked me for permission, I would have to turn him down.

Even Rudy wouldn't make one without permission.

And in my case, the real thing is close by, so there's no need for a substitute.

Although not to the extent of Sylphy, I won't complain about anything Rudy earnestly requests of me.

I would like to be spared from anything overly perverted though.

In any case, although I haven't known Cliff for all that long, would a devout Millis believer be happy to get something like that?

"It's a surprise present," is what Rudy had said, but I feel like he might get angry instead. But that's not a problem I need to worry about.

"I don't think it's something you could call work. He and Cliff are especially close."

"I see. If it was I, as long as it's not something outsiders shouldn't see, I wouldn't see any reason to go out of my way to deliver it myself, I'll attribute it to a difference in common sense."

No, it really is something outsiders shouldn't see.

If it didn't come together with an excuse, there's no way Cliff would take it.

"By the way, Lillia-san, where might Aisha-san be today?"

"Aisha has gone to pay a visit to the Mercenaries, she left this morning. It seems she won't be back until this afternoon."

Aisha is with the Mercenaries.

It's just that after hearing "Ars will be in the house all day today," She abruptly decided to leave.

She probably didn't want to be in the house.

Thinking about it, after Lucy and the others said they wanted to go out, Norn and Sylphy immediately agreed and they left.

Well Norn coming along was in part due to Lucy begging to go out with her.

"It seems those children aren't so fond of this house."

Claire breathed out her nose and took a sip of tea.

Maybe she didn't like the taste, but she knit her eyebrows.

And then with a somewhat troubled look on her face, she looked Lillia in the eyes.

“Lillia-san, when you came here last, I was quite harsh towards you.”

“...No, I do not think such at all.”

“I would like to apologise for it.

In that time, a man whose birth was unknown named himself Zenith's husband and requested assistance from my house.

After that, when I thought they had found Zenith, another woman naming herself his wife with her daughter appeared before me, I was not feeling of good temper.”

“I can understand your mindset. I do not mind.”

“And so, I somewhat held it against Aisha.”

What's this prickly mood.

It's making my stomach hurt.

“But my worry was reversed. You have served the Greyrat house well.

The reason Zenith has recovered to such an extent is due to your strong encouragement. I thank you for supporting Zenith from the shadows.”

“...I am unworthy of your words. I am in no way strong.”

“You are the only one who thinks that. If you had heard what Zenith had to say yesterday you would understand. Everyone in the Greyrat house is grateful towards you.”

“ ... ”

It's true.

Rudy may not be conscious of it, but he treats Lillia the same as Zenith.

Not as below her, but as an equal.

That said, Zenith is in a state which she can't voice her gratitude.

If Lillia made the choice, she could live not as a maid, but properly as his mother.

But if that were the case, our home might not be as peaceful as it currently is, and Zenith's treatment may not have been how it is.

It is because of Lillia, without desire, working from the shadows, that the Greyrat house is what it is today.

“You too Roxy-san.”

“Eh?”

Being suddenly addressed, I raised my head in surprise.

Claire wasn't looking at me, but at her own hands and Zenith.

And then she turned to look out the window.

“These last few days, I've been able to watch the children.

Every one of them are so lively.

Although Lara is somewhat overly mischievous, she's a good girl.”

“...Um, by any chance did she do something?”

“Yesterday morning, she gave me a frog as a present.”

I widened my eyes in surprise.

Just what is that girl doing?

“That's... Um, I'm terribly sorry. Please let me...”

“No apology is necessary. When lunch time came around I had it grilled and gave it back to her.”

I widened my eyes in surprise.

Now that I think about it, yesterday afternoon I remember seeing her eating something grilled.

But when I asked her what it was she told me it was a “Secret”...

“Of course, I had one of our chefs properly prepare it. I don't partake very often, but frog is quite a popular food around here.”

Because it rains quite often in the Millis continent, frog and lizard dishes are numerous.

During my time as an adventurer, I was quite grateful for that fact

Although there was the time before I knew detoxification magic that I almost died after eating a poisonous one...

But if they had a proper chef look at it, I'm sure they wouldn't feed Lara poison.

But that's quite surprising.

From what Rudy had told me, she was quite rigid, and wouldn't be the kind of person to do something like that.

"This morning she had told me "That snack yesterday was delicious, I will certainly repay this."

I don't have a clue what her intentions are in repaying me..."

Is she criticising her?

Her tone is sharp as always, and there isn't a hint of a smile on her face.

She's criticising her isn't she.

"Haa."

Claire let out a sigh.

It seems she's getting to the main topic.

"I don't know what has you so stiff, but Rudeus-san has told me that I am not to meddle in your family.

I do have some things I would like to say, but I intend to keep my promise."

When she says it like she's scolding me, I'm really not convinced.

"The reason why I have called the two of you here today is because, compared to the others, you two are the most mature.

Slyphiette-san is still young, and Eris-san is still immature.

I don't know how Zenith was before, but now, she isn't someone that needs to be cared for by others.

What I wish is for the two of you to take a step back and have a good look.

And so... *Cough* *Cough*..."

Claire had a coughing fit and the nearby maids ran over.

I stood up and prepared to cast detoxification magic.

But Claire shooed the maids away saying it was nothing and resumed drinking her tea.

“I’m fine, I just choked... Hmm?”

Claire was looking at Zenith.

She had just been looking at air seemingly oblivious to the conversation around her. But she had stood without Lillia’s incitement and was facing Claire with her vacant eyes.

“Should you not rest?”

Lillia had said it, but it almost sounded as if it had come from Zenith.

“Really, I simply choked a little and you’re causing such a fuss.

Everyone is surprised when they see me with a cane...

My back may be gone, but my mind is as sharp as ever.

You too Zenith, stop making that face and sit down.”

Hearing her mention Zenith’s face, I took another look at her.

It was the same blank expression.

I looked at Claire quizzically, but she also looked surprised.

For now, I’ll return to my own seat.

Zenith, by Lillia’s hand, was also back in her seat.

“ ... ”

Silence once again flowed.

Claire’s surprised expression gradually returned to normal.

But it seemed like she still wasn’t quite calm on the inside yet.

“...When she first stepped into the aristocracy.”

Claire once again started talking.

“When Zenith first attended a noble party, on the way out I lost my footing on a staircase and fell.”

Her tone had gotten emotional.

Before I knew it, Claire’s gaze had fell.

Something like sobbing had gotten mixed into Claire’s voice.

“It was no large injury. It was quickly mended with healing magic...

But for some reason, I can clearly remember Zenith’s face at the time.”

Something came dripping out of Claire’s sunken face.

She picked up the handkerchief by her side and wiped around her eyes.

“Zenith’s reputation was excellent, I was so proud. I, never once thought, I raised her wrong...”

Claire’s shoulders were shaking.

And I, not knowing what to say, simply stared at her.

“ ... ”

I suddenly thought.

My thoughts on the children’s futures.

I married Rudy, I gave birth to Lara and Lily.

I would leave the children to the family and teach at the Magic University.

Sylphy, Lillia and the like would look after the children at home, and I would look after them when they enrolled in the school.

It was a fulfilling life.

But I hadn’t given any thought to the idea on how to raise them.

Lara was the daughter I gave birth to, but compared to Lucy she was quite mischievous, and it had me worried.

Was it because I was of a Magic race, was it because she was half human, I worried about all kinds of things.

But before I knew it I had spent years worrying and she had already grown up.

She wasn't particularly cut off from the other children, and was quite close with Ars and Sieg.

She'll calm down when she gets older.(i)

That's what I thought. I was the same.

But I hadn't really thought of anything past that.

Lara has the role of 'Saviour' placed upon her, but I don't entirely understand what that's supposed to mean.

I knew she would participate in the fight against Hitogami, but what about after that?

Right, after the fight, life still continues.

Honestly, I thought worrying over it was pointless...

"I apologise for my loss of composure."

"Don't mind it."

"One shouldn't be crying at my age."

Claire, with her eyes still red, returned her handkerchief to the table.

She also cried yesterday, at the Miko's reenactment of Zenith's story.

"Ahem.

In the Holy Millis Nation, there is a saying that a broken house raises broken children.

I am also in agreement with that opinion."

Claire said that and took a strong look at us.

"The children of the Greyrat house are all healthy and in no way warped.

I would also never call Zenith warped.

But, from here on out, you should be careful.

On the chance that any abnormalities appear, you would be the first to notice."

Abnormality.

Like when Zenith decided to go out on her own.

It's certainly possible.

Especially Lara. I can never tell just what she's thinking.

No, it might not be Lara.

Maybe because she had been raised so meticulously, Lucy would be at the most risk.

At school she's a dedicated scholar...

Would I find some abnormality?

Uh... Just thinking about it makes my head hurt.

"I called you here today to tell you just that."

Claire leaned deeply back into her chair.

Lillia and I exchanged glances.

In response to my bewilderment, Lillia looked at Claire with determination.

"I understand. You may leave it to me."

She looks like a soldier just entrusted with an important mission.

She can probably say that because she has confidence in the way she raised Norn and Aisha.

Oh, Rudy too.

"I will also do what I can."

I also said that.

It's not because I have confidence.

As a teacher I've seen all kinds of people,

But I still don't think I'm qualified for it.

But through Eris and Sylphy's guidance, I hope I can provide a new path for anyone who strays.

If it's that much, I can manage.

I have to.

But that's not all there is to it.

Although Claire has her own viewpoint, I have to look at it objectively.

She's from the Demon Expulsion Faction, so her opinions ought to reflect that.

I want to be able to respond to her request, even though she thinks little of me as the Magic Race I am.

“Hmm?”

The door to the room opened.

A white dog walked into the room.

And of course, on top of it was Lara.

Lara was, for some reason, covered in mud.

Both her shoes and clothes.

Even though I've told her so many times to not walk into the house with dirty shoes.

“Lara, don't ride Leo inside.”

Lara looked annoyed about it, but she still got off him.

I don't tell her very often around the house, but I feel like it's been working as of late.

Even at school, whenever I take my eyes off her, she's always on him.

I feel like sighing.

Lara just slowly walked up to Claire.

“Hi-Baachan, I found something cool.”

“What is it?”

“This.”

Lara reached into her pocket and pulled out some round gold object.

I couldn't see it well from where I was sitting, but it looked like a necklace of some kind.

Claire was amazed when she saw it.

“Where did you find this?”

“The garden; lost. Hi-Baachan you’ve been looking for it right?”

“Yes, for quite a while now... But, how?”

“Ba-chan said: “Even though you were always wearing it; you probably ruined your back bent over searching for it””

Lara looked at Zenith and said that.

That wasn’t something the Miko had said the other day.

Lara probably heard it herself maybe yesterday or this morning.

“And you went to find it for me?”

“As thanks for the snack yesterday.”

“ ... ”

“It was delicious, but those are better as snacks.”

Lara shifted her attention to the table.

She’s looking at the cakes that came out with the tea.

“You can eat them if you want.”

“Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub.”¹

Lara grabbed one and put it straight into her mouth.

With both explosiveness and agility, in an instant she had cleared the table.

I at least wanted to tell her to wash her hands first.

“Ah.”

She ate mine too.

“ ... ”

Well I don’t really mind.

If I ask Rudy I can have sweets whenever I want...

I won’t get mad at a child for stealing my food.

But my...

“Ahhh~”

She looked quite satisfied as she swallowed the last bite.

Leo was astonished.

As if he was wondering where his portion was.

We're in the same boat.

“Yup, it's better than frog.”

“Well then I guess I'll have to have some ready for tomorrow as well.”

“Yay!”

Lara got back on Leo and headed back outside.

She had already forgot my warning not to ride Leo inside.

“Ah, um, I'm sorry she doesn't have any manners.”

I apologised but Claire was focused on what Lara had brought to her.

When I got a closer look, I could see it was a gold locket.

It had a young man's picture inside.

“Carlyle gave this to me just before we were married.”

“ ... ”

“It was something far too expensive for his station at the time but he had told me: “After we are married, I will be a member of the Latrea house, and I will no longer be able to buy you something with money that is wholly my own.””

She sounds touched remembering it.

“I had lost it about a year ago, but had been bent over looking for it, my back became as such and I was forced to give up...”

The maids were also surprised by it.

Claire probably didn't tell the servants she had lost it.

"Roxy-san."

"Yes."

"There is no need to be caught up in formalities when expressing gratitude."

"...Haa."

"Lara's manners are plenty sufficient. It seems I was mistaken."

No, I don't really think Lara is that admirable of a girl.

But if she can say that, I may have been mistaken about the woman called Claire Latrea.

Rudy had been quite wary, and Aisha outright hates her.

I had been quite on guard, I wonder why.

Or perhaps she has changed since Rudy last met her.

He has an effect on all kinds of people...

In any case, I think I can get along with this person.

We haven't known each other for long, but after this visit, we may never meet again.

"Make sure that girl doesn't fall down the wrong path."

"Of course."

I nodded in response.

Chapter 17

Along The Holy Sword Highway

Part 1

Time flew by and our 10 day stay passed in the blink of an eye.

The first day was a visit to the cathedral.

We took Zenith to the Miko and she used her power to hear what she had to say.

Claire was with us too, and half way she broke down into tears.

I almost did as well, but seeing that Zenith was happy as always, I held it in.

While we were doing that the children seemed quite bored waiting outside, but we still had to meet with the Pope together with the Miko so we ended up taking quite a while.

The Miko kept bragging about her daily training routine and how slim she'd gotten and just wouldn't stop...

The kids must really have been bored out there.

Apparently Aisha took Ars, Lara, and Sieg to see the Adventurers Guild HQ.

Going by the fact that they go back so late and Ars's face when he got back, it looked like some problem had occurred...

But Aisha had probably already dealt with it.

But it didn't seem that Lucy was mad at being left behind.

She and Clive were probably satisfied looking around the Cathedral together.

She might have liked the gardens or maybe Clive's tour was quite entertaining.

And seeing that Lucy wouldn't tell me the details it was probably the latter.

If I pressed it I might have gotten it out of her, but I held back.

In any case, I'd like for Clive-kun to continue to be sincere.

The second, third, and fourth days were spent giving various greetings.
Letting people know that the Dragon God's subordinate was in Millishion.
The Holy Knight Captain.

Various members of the Latrea family. And of course among them was my aunt Therese.
She's unfortunately still unmarried.
After that was the formal audience with the Pope...

I met with the Millis Royal Family.

The 5th Royal Prince. And although he was a prince he was over forty.

It was a real pain, but I eventually managed to secure an audience with the King in several days time.

For a greeting as the representative of the Dragon God.

Orsted had said, "It's fine if you put off making relations with the Millis Royal Family," but I asked him before and a simple greeting was fine.

I don't know why he said that after hearing that we were going there for a holiday, but the original purpose was show the kids different parts of society.

I myself didn't see any problem.

On the fifth day we delivered the doll to Cliff.

When we got there he had some good news for us.

In the last five years he seemed to be evaluated quite highly and they were considering his promotion to Bishop.

Normally that would be impossible as young as he is, but I'm sure there's some kind of ulterior motive.

The parish Cliff is in charge of is in a particularly special location.

The southernmost point of the Great Forest.

When I went through it while traveling, it wasn't a particularly important place.

But it seems that in the last 10 years the scope of the place has increases along with the number of people.

The city isn't affiliated with any particular country or race, but when places get larger like that, people are bound to be interested.

And so, various representatives of different races have gathered there to decide all kinds of things.

The Millis Church's representative is an Archbishop known as the Cardinals' Dagger and part of the Demon Expulsion Faction.

He follows the Human Supremacy Doctrine, so not only is he against the Magic Races, but the Beast Races too. He's a disdainful man, but he's good at his job.

I'm sure he's working to assure all kinds of things are in his interests.

But considering his personality, putting him there could cause problems with their relationship with the Great Forest.

But there are some especially extreme groups among the Demon Expulsion faction that welcome such a turn of events.

And so that's why Cliff was chosen.

Because of his relationship with the Rudo Mercenaries who employ a number of beast races and one of the Beast Race Princesses.

He was well connected, possessed no prejudice and he was of the pope faction.

So they raised his rank and gave him the job of overseer.

Cliff seemed disappointed that he wasn't chosen purely for his ability.

But regardless, after he finishes his work in the city, he'll be a Bishop in both name and rank.

Once he becomes a bishop, his influence will increase, and if he can gain favour with the Elves of the Great Forest, the church may stand for him taking one as a wife.

If that happens he'll be able to invite Elinalise and Clive to Millis.

And after hearing that much I was like "Then here's your promotion gift!"

And took out the doll, but he got super mad.

Apparently if they knew he was with a woman at this time, it would be a big fuss.

That said, he didn't completely outlaw the doll, so I think he might have been happy with the idea.

He seemed quite curious as to the details of its Magic Formation.

Well if it comes down to it we can always put some sunglasses on it and dress it as a man, like Sylphy suggested.

It has the strength to act as a bodyguard so I'm sure it would be helpful for Cliff in his line of work.

There's no guarantee that that Archbishop won't try to assassinate him.

Incidentally, when I returned that day, Claire was in quite a good mood.

Apparently Lara found her locket that she had lost a year ago.

It's a good story.

A parent loves to boast about their kids.

...Although Leo was probably the one doing the searching.

And Roxy's child raising motivation seemed to have increased.

"All the children will be at school soon, so I'm going to have to properly watch over them," she said.

Roxy's cute but she's the type to worry too much when she's enthusiastic about something so I'm a little worried.

Also, apparently Sylphy and Norn took Lucy and Clive to the Adventurers Guild.

Lucy talked about how wonderful their lunch was with a massive smile plastered over her face.

It seemed like she wasn't that interested in the guild itself.

On the sixth and seventh days we walked around with no particular goal.

We went shopping and took the kids sightseeing.

We took a carriage out of the city to look around, we stopped at a nearby farm, we let the kids play in the river we came across.

We basically just did whatever we felt like.

The ninth day was the audience with the King.

The Millis King was a mild old man.

In Millis the Church holds most of the power so the Royal family is comparatively weak.

And because of my connections with the church, the meeting was simply a formality.

I would have liked to show the castle to the children, but I held myself back on that one.

...Well it couldn't be helped.

Because we could say that we enjoyed Millishion to the limit.

Part 2

It's now the tenth day.

Time for us to leave Millishion.

We'll head north through the Blue Dragon Mountain Range towards the hot springs.

"There aren't any monsters until we reach the entrance to the Great Forest, but I hear there are a lot of ruffians near the town stops.

Just you alone would be one thing, but to bring children along too, you'll should be a bit more careful..."

Right before we left, Claire gave us a good mouthful.

When I was here last, she was reprimanding me for all kinds of things, but when we first arrived she didn't say much, now, by the tenth day, she seems to have no problem scolding us.

Although she's not unpleasant about it.

She probably finally managed to get a feel of the distance between us.

But right before we left, she turned to face Norn.

"Norn-san, this time around we didn't talk all that much, but would it be alright if I said just one thing to you?"

"...Yes."

Norn had "Here it comes," written all over her face.

She's been trying her best to avoid Claire these past 10 days.

Even in spite of Ruijerd telling her to treasure her relatives...

But Norn couldn't be blamed.

If they were to talk, Claire might end up bad mouthing Ruijerd.

And if that happened, I'm sure Norn would fight back in turn.

Claire's quite stubborn, so I'm sure she wouldn't take back anything she said and it's quite possible it could turn into a massive ordeal.

“You are no longer a Latrea or a Greyrat.”

“Yes.”

In that instant, Norn’s expression was extremely aggressive.

She probably expected something unfavourable about being a Demon’s wife.

That’s just how sharp Claire’s words were.

Even I had a premonition that something bad was going to happen.

“You are now the wife and mother of the Sperdia Family. Be aware of that and work yourself to the bone for your husband.”

“Eh?”

But what Claire followed up with was something quite sensible.

It did sound somewhat like an order though...

“I am not knowledgeable of Demon customs but is it a wife’s duty to protect their children and house, I’m sure that hasn’t changed.”

“ ... ”

“Do you understand?”

“Ah... Yes!”

Norn looked quite shocked but she eventually meekly nodded.

Claire then nodded in satisfaction.

As if a weight was lifted from her shoulders.

I feel like Claire has changed in these last 10 days.

Maybe because of that, Roxy and Lillia could spend their last few days here relaxing.

Something probably happened in the time I was away.

Especially Claire and Roxy. They seem much closer compared to when they just met.

She’s probably happy Claire wasn’t discriminating against her.

Roxy’s had more than enough of that in her time after all.

And thanks to that, Norn probably managed to get over a little of her ill feelings.
...Aisha is the same as ever though.

Part 3

After about half a day's travel from Millishion, we arrived at the entrance to the Blue Dragon Mountain Range.

We stopped the carriage and got the children off.

And then we turned around.

“ ... ”

A spectacle opened up before us.

You could see the City of Millishion in the distance.

The river flowing through the city, green as far as the eye can see.

We spent 10 days there.

The Brilliant white Royal Palace, the glittering gold Cathedral, and the Sparkling silver Adventurers Guild.

It's the same view I saw together with Eris and Ruijerd 20 years ago.

Although the small building and the people living there might be different, seeing it like this makes it seem like nothing's changed.

“What do you think?”

This kind of massive scenery is something you can see quite often in this world, but I would bet there's no other place that you could walk around in and then look at it from a distance like this.

It gives a kind of indescribable feeling.

I stopped thinking to myself and turned around to check the children's reactions.

“Wow~!”

They were quite varied.

Lucy had a smile of honest admiration.

She's been acting more and more like the eldest sister lately, but she's still quite childish in this aspect.

...Oh, Clive next to her seems to be debating to himself whether or not to grab her hand. But he didn't get far before Lucy turned and smiled at him. "It's amazing!" she said, before Clive blushed and threw out "It's not all that great."

He's so cute...

Just watching them makes me feel more relaxed.

I remember when I was doing things like that... Wait, did I? I have a feeling I didn't.

Oh, and Cliff is with us this time around.

He's going to be with us until we get to the post town where he's going to be inspecting his new church.

Although that's just the official excuse.

He had managed to convince the Pope to let him spend some time with Elinalise.

"...I wanna live here some day. It's full of sweets."

Lara stared sleepily for a couple seconds and said that.

I had heard from Roxy in the carriage just before, but apparently Claire was pampering Lara quite a bit.

Claire would prepare sweets for her every day, and she spent each one with a smile of bliss on her face.

She does seem somewhat more plump compared to when we got here.

It seems she was silently living in sweets paradise.

"Hey, Papa and Red Mama came here a while back right?"

"Yeah, but I was a little older than you are now."

"Hmm..."

Ars nodded and clenched his fist.

He's probably thinking of becoming an adventurer in the future.

"Hey, Hey, Mama! That's the Nicholas River! And over there is the forest where the goblins live!"

"That's right. Do you know what that one is?"

"That one... It's the Gate of Triumph! The Gate of Triumph is where Saint Millis returned after the war!

That's why it's bigger than the rest!"

"That's right. You sure do know a lot."

Sieg was pointing at everything he could see, assaulting Roxy with one question after another.

Alek has been telling him stories of all kinds of adventurers so he's oddly well informed. He seems even more likely than Ars to get into adventuring.

"Papa, pick me up."

Chris walked up to me and held her hands up.

"...Do you not understand them?"

"Yea..."

After I picked her up, as if she had no interest in the scenery, she buried her face in my shoulder.

Chris is cute as always.

"..."

Lily also got Sylphy to pick her up, and was playing with a Magic Tool we bought in the streets the other day.

She doesn't seem all that interested either.

It's probably a bit too early for these two.

I guess that's pretty normal.

Or maybe Lucy and the others who can be honestly impressed with the scenery just mature faster.

“...It sure brings me back.”

Eris was next to me before I even realised.

“Back then, I never would have thought we’d end up like this.”

Eris looked over Millishion as if she were embracing it.

Her red hair was fluttering in the wind.

She’s still young, but she’d graduated from childhood into a beautiful woman.

“What did you think would happen?”

“...I thought, we’d end up with something more simple.”

Our lives really aren’t that simple.

Eris doesn’t think too hard about many things, but it’s not like she doesn’t put thought into anything.

Although she’s calmed down after giving birth to two children, time changes people.

“I love you Rudeus.”

Eris suddenly looked me in the eyes and said that.

She’s making my heart race.

What do I do. Right now, My face is probably bright red.¹

“I love you too Eris.”

I managed to calm myself down and say that, and Eris leaned on me slightly.

This would be my chance to get my hands on Eris, but unfortunately, they’re holding something else important.

Instead I thought to just tickle Chris and she quickly began to giggle.

“Papa, no tickling.”

“Whoops, sorry.”

“You won't tickle?”

“I won't, I promise.”

Eris began to giggle at our exchange and kissed me on the cheek.

She then kissed Chris on the forehead and turned to the others.

“I guess it's about time we got moving.”

After she said that, we headed back for the carriage.

Part 4

In the valley that divides the Blue Dragon Mountain Range.

On the proverbial 'handle' of the Holy Sword Highway.

The cliffs rise up straight from the ground, with only the occasional rock jutting out, producing a gloomy valley as far as the eye can see.

The children were quite excited when they first saw it.

Even Lara let one of her rare "Wow,"s slip.

The adventure has begun.

From here on out, we have no idea what we might come across.

Will we see monsters? I had heard that there was a Blue Dragon somewhere near here, but will we get a chance to see it...?

Our hopes were destroyed after a few days.

The scenery never changed.

Because it's not the right season, there were no dragons.

And of course, we didn't see any monsters.

The valley just continued on endlessly.

The children were over it within three days.

Lara didn't even try to hide it and would just shout "I'm bored!" repeatedly. Occasionally she would say "I'm walking Leo," leave the Carriage, and go off somewhere on top of him. If she finds a gap she might even be able to climb the cliff.

Ars, Sieg and Clive didn't say anything, but you could see the delight on their faces whenever the carriage stopped and they could practice their combat with Eris, or have mock battles with each other, or practice magic with Roxy.

We wasted our days away in the rocking carriage.

Chris was crying “We’re trapped!” and Lily had already disassembled the magic toy she had gotten only a few days prior.

The only quiet one was Lucy, who was still reading the book she had gotten from the Latrea house.

I hope she doesn’t get motion sick reading on a carriage.

The carriage was in constant pandemonium.

We all worked together to try to pacify the kids...

But this is the first time they’ve been out after all, so maybe we should have stopped by some more interesting places.

Although there is the matter of safety.

That said.

It’s precisely because they were so over it, that when we got to the post town, they were overwhelmed with excitement.

“We’re heeeeeeeere!”

The second they saw the town at the end of the valley, Ars, Sieg, and Lara all jumped straight out of the carriage.

“Don’t go running off!”

Eris and Sylphy chased after them.

Ars and Sieg got caught by the scruff of the neck, but Leo managed to slip away and climb onto a rock some way up the cliff.

That said, there’s no reason to panic.

The Holy Sword Highway is a relatively safe place.

“Lara! We’re all sticking together until we get to the inn!”

Eris’s shout was oddly restless.

She was also quite bothered being cooped up in the carriage.

She's much more mature and calm than she used to be, but you can't change a person's true nature.

Eris has never been someone able to sit around for a long period of time.

Ars and Sieg reluctantly returned to the carriage.

But Lara didn't.

She stared at the forest that opened up endlessly before her.

"Lara, come back."

Lara turned around to look at Sylphy but Leo didn't move.

She looked at both Sylphy and Leo, got off his back, and tapped him a couple times.

But seeing that he still didn't move, she looked somewhat troubled.

Sylphy, no longer able to wait, began to walk up to them.

But the second she reached out to Leo, Lara stepped in between them.

"Wait."

"You can look at it all you want tomorrow, so let's go."

"This is Leo's first time seeing his home like this, wait a little."

"I see..."

Sylphy looked like she didn't know what to do and looked towards me.

I'd like to let him look, a little more, but right now we're moving together.

I'd like to get going quickly to keep the children from exploding.

What to do... Even if Leo is with her, there's no way I can let them catch up by themselves.

Sylphy's probably thinking the same.

I got off the carriage and walked up to them.

"I'll bring them back, so you go on ahead."

"...Ok. Come find us before it gets dark."

Sylphy took me on my word, nodded, and headed back towards the carriage.

I sat down on the rock next to Leo.

And Lara sat down next to me.

The three of us in a line, overlooking the Great Forest.

Although it's a relatively flat and straight road, because it passes through a mountain, we have a good view from above.

A brown line cuts through green as far as the eye can see.

It's kind of magnificent.

Thinking back on it, last time I was here, I never even turned around to take a look...

"Lara?"

"Yeah?"

"Does Leo miss it?"

"...It doesn't, seem like it."

Doesn't seem like it, huh.

"Huh..."

"..."

Then I wonder what he's feeling.

Since I'm not Bowlingual I can't tell, but the one that is, doesn't speak all that much.²

I don't want to ask her too much so I don't make her feel like an interpretation machine.³

Whatever, I'll change the topic.

"Lara?"

"Yeah?"

"I was going to tell you when you turned 10, but when you get older, you're supposed to go to the Dorudia village for some kind of ritual at their Holy Tree."

"I know, I heard."

"From who?"

"Leo."

From the Holy Beast himself huh.

“You know Pursena right?”

“Aisha-nee’s dog.”

That’s a harsh rating.

Although she’s not wrong.

“You’ll go together with her.”

Lara looked somewhat puzzled at that.

“...Papa won’t come too?”

“I’d like to, but it’s one of the Beast Race’s special rituals so Humans might not be allowed.”

Or is she thinking something else?

Does she not want her Papa to come because it’s embarrassing?

Although I think she’s still a bit young for her rebellious phase...

And then Leo looked at me.

“Woof.”

“...Leo says it’s not a problem.”

She’s probably talking about me coming along.

Since she took the trouble to translate for me... I guess that means she’s not against the idea.

That said, when she gets older, she’ll probably find every reason she can to dislike me.

Don’t wash my clothes with your underwear! Or something like that.

Chris is still saying things like “I’ll marry Papa when I grow up,” but i’m sure that’ll change when she gets a little older.

“Papa.”

“Hmm?”

“It’s alright, you can look forward to it.”

“...Thanks, I guess I will.”

I don't know what I should be looking forward to, but for now I'll agree.

Lara returned my nod looking satisfied and stood up.

Is it time to go now?

But right as I was about to get up,

“Whou...!”

Something suddenly landed on my shoulders.

But when I saw the tiny shoes in my field of vision, I knew that Lara had climbed onto me.

“Carry me.”

“...Am I Leo's replacement now?”

“I want to be pampered by Papa.”

So it's like that.

Well then, I guess I shall oblige.

Rudeus-san spoils his daughters.

“ARH-WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO”

As I stood up, Leo howled.

The sound rang far through the Great Forest.

Chapter 18

Hot Springs

Part 1

When you think of mountains, hot springs come to mind.

After that, we arrived in the post town, and after pushing our way through the swarms of Beast Races' gathering to meet Leo, we arrived at our inn.

After taking a quick stroll through the town, we met up with our guide, Talhand.

And after the children fell asleep, we had an adult-only meeting in the tavern.

After our stay at the inn, we set out first thing in the morning.

Following Talhand's directions, we arrived at the hot springs.

We had heard that Monsters appear around the hot springs, but it was much closer than I thought.

You can see from the rockface the other day meets the milky white of the hot springs.

The entire area was surrounded by a large stone wall to keep the Monsters out.

And if you look down in the direction we climbed up, you can see the post town in the distance.

In other words, it's an open air bath with a superb view.

And of course, it's a mixed bath.

But there really aren't many people here.

There aren't even any Humans.

If you look around, it's almost entirely Dwarves and Hobbits, with the occasional Beast Race.

Hot springs probably aren't all that popular with Humans or Elves.

In Human culture, baths like this are usually the things of Nobility.

Well then, there aren't many people.

And there are no Humans.

That said, there are men.

There are men and women.

Showing my beloved wives' and daughters' naked bodies to unknown men is a good thing.

Wait, no it's not.

Especially this time, because it's not just *my* wives.

Elinalise is here too.

Even if she used to be your friendly neighbourhood adventuring stripper, I will find pleasure in seeing another man's sexy Elf wife naked.

Wait, that's not right.

And so, with that in mind, I have prepared a special kind of bathrobe.

It's a Kantoui Made of a dark fabric.¹

It has no particular resistances, but it's made to feel natural like a swimsuit when wearing it.

The designer is Aisha Greyrat.

"Aisha-nee, they have a waterfall over there!"

"Huh? Were?"

"Look, it's over there, there."

"Aah, wait Mama."

Aisha, along with Eris, Ars, and Sieg all seem excited to be in a hot spring for the first time, and are exploring their new environment.

The dark black fabric isn't see through, but it does cling, making the figure completely visible.

And they're moving all over generously exposing it.

Eris probably hasn't noticed so that's fine... And Aisha probably doesn't even care.

Well whatever.

This is a place anyone can enter.
As long as the important places are hidden it's fine.
Let those who are embarrassed be so.

Although I do hope they don't cause trouble for anyone else here.
Even here, there are manners that are necessary.

"Hey Blue Mama, you've been here before haven't you?"

"Yes, it was a long time ago."

"Tell us!"

"Sure. It was right after I had left the Magic Continent, around the time I had just graduated from being a beginner Adventurer..."

Roxy was telling a story to Lucy with Lily in her arms.

Clive was also listening in nearby.

Clive's face was bright red, probably because of Lucy's state of dress.

But it's too early for you to know those kinds of feelings Clive-kun.

Your father, nor I, will permit it at such an age.

"...And so Holy Beast-sama, this is the Saviour-sama?"

"Ruff!"

"I see!"

"..."

Lara and Leo were surrounded by Beast Races'

Lara has her usual bold expression, but she looks somewhat bothered.

It was like this in the post town as well.

"Chris-sama, If you get hot, please say. I will prepare you something to drink."

"Kaaay~..."

Lillia was washing Zenith and looking after Chris.

She was sitting with me before but she didn't like the hot water so she quickly got out.

Now she's clinging to Zenith.

Well, that's fine.

“...Aaaah! This is the best...!”

“This is the first time I've drank Dwarf liquor. It's pretty strong... But it's good.”

And Sylphy, Elinalise, Cliff, Talhand, and I are all drinking together.

We bought some Dwarven liquor in the post town and chilled it.

I've never tasted anything like it before, I don't even know what it's made of, but I do know that it's good.

It goes down smoothly and as it passed your throat, gives a soft scent of flowers.

The cold penetrates your body and slowly warms you up from the inside.

“Rudy, come on, give it here. Give me a drink? Come on...”

Sylphy got drunk real quick and now she's snuggling up to me somewhat dazed.

Drunk Sylphy is as cute as ever.

So cute that you'd never expect she's a mother of two.

This isn't something to show the children.

“Right, of course.”

Soaking in a hot spring, with an arm around a beautiful girl drinking together.

This is the best.

I'm in paradise.

“ ... ”

At least I should be...

“ ... ”

But something's been giving me shivers.

“ ... ”

I already know the cause.
The man quietly drinking in front of me.

Talhand.

A former member of Paul's old party 『Black Wolf's Fang』 .

An S rank Adventurer currently working solo.

A capable and trustworthy man.

“ ... ”

I have no reason to doubt him.

If he does something I can deal with it.

And I did conduct a comprehensive interview to determine if he was Hitogami's apostle.

Although there was the case with Gisu.

He calmly lied through his teeth and did whatever he wanted.

So although I can't be sure, if I start thinking like that, I won't be able to trust anyone.

I have already decided to trust Talhand.

But why.

His gaze gives me chills.

The journey to the hot spring was the same.

We were protecting the carriage the children were riding in.

Eris was the vanguard, Elinalise and I were the front with Talhand right behind us and Sylphy and Roxy were behind the carriage.

I was using earth Magic to make the carriage ride smoother but I kept getting those chills.
and whenever I looked back, Talhand was staring at me.

Well it should be obvious that since he was right behind me, and we were walking in the same direction, that when I turn around he'd be looking at me.

I was probably just nervous walking along a known Monster path with the children.

I'm just overthinking it...

But I just can't understand why his gaze gives me chills.

"Um, what is it?"

And before I knew it, I had asked him that.

"What is what?"

"I get the feeling you've been staring at me a while.

"Aah... Of course. You much resemble Paul. I have been observing."

"My father?"

"Yes, with you walking in line with Elinalise, it brings back memories of old. The back's of Elinalise, Ghislaine and Paul, Gisu and Zenith's voice behind... I am reminded of my days in the 『Black Wolf's Fang』."

Talhand looks engrossed in pleasant memories as he strokes his beard.

I can't see my own back, so I don't really understand, but is that how it is.

But then, what are the chills I've been feeling.

Odd.

"Rudeus, I'd be careful if I were you, this Dwarf will drink up men too."

"Eeh."

Elinalise said that with her head on Cliff's shoulder.

Talhand looked somewhat sullen at her remark.

"Don't say things in such a way that will cause misunderstandings."

Right.

What will I do with Elinalise-san.

Can she think anything remotely pure?

This damn dirty Elf.

“I take men only.”

This dirty Dwarf!

Wait...

That means the chill I felt...

He's aiming for me!?

I-if you lay your hands on me, Eris won't stay quiet!

She'll chop you in two!²

But then Sylphy tremblingly grabbed hold of me.

And as if to protect me, gave Talhand a stern look.

“Rest easy, I won't lay a hand on someone without interest, let alone a married man.”

So he does have his morals intact.

Well I guess that's obvious.

He may be like that, but that just means his preferences are slightly different.

When you think about it that way, it's perfectly normal.

“But you've been staring at his ass this whole time haven't you?”

“It's in a man's nature to appreciate fine buttocks... You understand nay?”

Talhand looks somewhat troubled at Elinalise's inability to stop talking.

Of course, I understand what he's talking about.

I've been staring at Eris's ass as she walks around too.

Aah, Eris is looking this way.

She couldn't have felt the chills too right?

Aah, she hid her chest! She knows!

But you're hiding the wrong place! I wasn't looking at your breasts, but your ass!³

“Your resemblance to Paul is genuine... But if you possess some aversion to it, I shall cease.”

“Not really, if you're just looking, go ahead.”

“Hoho, then I shall take you up on that.”

Talhand said that with a smile on his face and took another swig.

“How about another?”

“I think I will.”

People have all kinds of tastes.

If the other party has their morals in check, there’s no need to be any more wary than normal.

It’s no big deal having him ogle me.

Well, Talhand is built like a bear, so I don’t really think I have anything to compare to though.

“But still, I never thought you would agree to be our guide.”

Elinalise suddenly said that.

“I don’t understand your meaning.”

“I mean, I thought you were avoiding going back to your home town.

This hot spring is in Dwarf territory isn’t it?

Won’t it be a problem for you if someone you know spots you?”

It seems there are some circumstances behind Talhand’s past.

Now that I think about it, among Paul’s ex-party members, he’s the one I know the least about.

Well I guess the fact that I wasn’t all that interested played a part.

“...Hah. That’s rich coming from the woman who claimed it to be impossible for her to stick to one man.”

“Life can change people.”

“I think the same. It was a good opportunity, so I thought I would settle it.”

“Oh, how manly.”

“I need not your flattery. After seeing all of you, I simply thought it pathetic to have avoided my family for decades.”

Talhand said that with an unpleasant look on his face and took another swig.

“Does that mean you’ll be going back to your village?”

“Essentially.”

“Rudeus, go ahead.”

Hearing my name called, I turned around.

It took me a second to realise what she meant.

She probably realised that it would be a good opportunity for me.

But I am with my family right now, would it be a good idea to ask?

Well getting an answer now should be fine.

“Actually, I had the intention to make contact with the Ore God...”

“The Ore God?”

“Yes, or someone of that level of influence... I would like to extend an official greeting as the subordinate of the Dragon God.”

I don’t know what kind of standing Talhand has in his village.

Asking something like this might even get him in trouble.

So I can only hope.

“Hmm... He’s a very hard person to please.”

Orsted said the same thing.

That he’s hard to please and hard to like.

The only things he likes are liquor, gems and raw materials that can be made into armour.

But simply gifting him a bunch of that, wouldn’t be enough to make an alliance.

“Even if I ask, you might get turned down.”

“Do you know him?”

“Somewhat...”

Talhand nodded while pondering.

They might be related.

When I get back I'll have to ask Orsted about it.

"I won't ask you to force anything, there are probably many things you have to consider after all."

"That's quite true..."

He took another drink in thought and let out a breath reeking of alcohol.

"I will think about it."

"I understand. I apologise for asking something unreasonable."

As I was about to bow to him, he pointed the top of the bottle at me.

"Don't apologise, just drink," is what he seemed to be telling me.

I obeyed his command and held out my cup.

Part 2

After we got out of the bath, we headed back to our rooms.

After that we had the rest of the family wait in the inn as Roxy, Talhand, Elinalise, and I went to look for somewhere to install the Teleport Formation.

We only took those used to walking through mountains.

Eris wanted to come too, but I had her stay back as a guard.

And so the four of us entered the mountain.

It was just past the inn.

Somewhere people don't come across often is ideal for a Teleport Formation.

Ariel once told me that the majors powers want to have Teleport Gates connecting them and they're currently making plans for it...

But that's still quite far off.

Lifting the taboo on Teleport Magic.

Until we know that it's a real possibility, I'll still have to keep putting my personal Formations where people can't find them.

If we go too high we'll be in Blue Dragon territory, so we still have to keep it within reachable range.

"I guess about here's fine..."

Now that we've found somewhere to set it up, it's time to make a building.

It's basically made the same as a Dragon Race relic.

Four rooms with a hidden staircase in one leading to the Teleport Formation.

I've left Roxy and Elinalise outside to keep watch.

I dig the hole with Earth Magic and begin forming the room.

I had Talhand help out with the specifications of the inside.

Nobody's going to stumble across here, but the Formation lead to the office.

So in the million to one chance someone finds it, we'd be in trouble.

And so with that in mind, I dressed it up like a real ruin so any travellers that come across it leave satisfied. I even threw in something that looked like a treasure chest.

I set it up like something along the lines of a rest stop.

It should seem like somewhere ancient travellers would be able to take a break.

Talhand was the one who made the furnishings.

He certainly lives up to the Dwarves' legacy of craftsmanship.

He crafted it all from a single huge piece of stone and even made them look appropriately worn.

By the time the sun set, the building looked like it had been standing there for over a thousand years.

"It's impressive. I don't think anyone will be able to tell."

"There aren't any plants or moss. Anybody who knows what they're doing could tell right away."

Oh.

It seems the craftsman is unsatisfied with his work.

That said, I don't think anyone will come across it that quickly.

If someone does eventually stumble across it, it should look properly aged by then.

There's nobody around to clean it after all.

"Is it even alright for us to be erecting a building here? The Dwarves have sealed it off haven't they?"

"The Dwarves treat the mountain as something of a God and buildings are considered offerings. No matter what we build, nobody's going to complain."

Is that how it is?

Maybe I should have made the outside more gaudy instead of hiding it all underground.

The fact that the entrance leads underground basically screams that something fishy is going on.

Well I guess it's too late now.

“Since we’re done here, we should head back.”

“I’ll be there in a second.”

Finally, I activated the Formation and Teleported.

After confirming that it does in fact lead to the office, I head back.

“All good.”

“...”

“If something comes up I’d be fine with you using it too Talhand-san.”

“No thank you. I shall make due with my feet.”

Talhand shook his head and refused.

So for now, the Teleport Formation is complete.

All that’s left is to head back.

Part 3

The next day, we set out from the town early in the morning.

And here is where we parted with Cliff and Talhand.

We gave our goodbyes before getting in the carriage.

Cliff is to conduct his investigation today and return to Millishion within the next few.

“Clive, make sure you’re a good boy.”

“Of course!”

Cliff really didn’t want to say goodbye to Clive.

It’s not like they won’t see each other again.

But it’s always painful to part with family.

“Make sure too keep up with both your studies and training. Don’t make that girl you like cry. Be kind.”

“T-There’s no girl I like!”

“In that case, treat everybody as kindly as you would a girl you like. Alright?”

“...Ok.”

He gave Clive a good pat on the head and turned to me.

“Rudeus, I’ll leave Lise and Clive to you.”

“Of course. You keep at it too Cliff-senpai.”

“You bet.”

Cliff turned around as if no further words were necessary.

The fact that he doesn’t need to say anything else is a testament to his faith in me.

And I plan to live up to it.

Well, Elinalise has everything pretty much together so there’s not really much I can do.

I guess I'll just have to turn Clive into a great man for the day he asks for Lucy's hand.
...No it's not set in stone.
I'll just make sure to be there if they ever need help.

I walked towards Elinalise and Roxy who were talking to Talhand off to the side.
Apparently he's temporarily returning to Millishion.
There seems to be some sort of preparation necessary before returning to the Dwarf village.
Although I'm not sure if he needs to get something or prepare himself mentally.

"Talhand-san, I would like to thank you for your help."
"Of course."
"I wish you luck with your family and your village."
"Having Paul's son worry about me is somewhat disturbing."

Talhand gave me a good look.
I have a feeling he might be checking me out.

"I thought so yesterday too, but as long as you show the Ore God 'That' he might even be happy to meet with you."
"'That'?"
"The dark hard one from yesterday."
"Eeh!?"

My hard dark what!?
Is the Ore God a homo?
Wait, I'm not that dark.
I guess I would be hard, am I? I don't have anyone to compare too.
Roxy, don't just blush, say something.
"No, it's mine," or something like that.

"Talhand if you just say his thick dark hard one, he won't understand. Be more clear."
"I didn't say thick. That one from yesterday. The big rock you made from Earth Magic. I don't know whether to call it a mineral or a crystal."

Oh the rock.

I did make a bunch of big black rocks yesterday.

I was going after toughness, so they did end up quite hard.

So he was just talking about the rock...

Oh, Roxy's face is bright red.

Hmmm? Just what were you imagining? Oh Roxy you dirty girl.

Well I was thinking the same thing though.

"If I have a sample to take with me it might help with the request."

"Sure."

I immediately conjured up a stone bar with Earth Magic.

A thick hard black one.

Of course it's quite heavy.

It's about 15cm long and probably weighs over 10kg.

If you plated it with gold you might even be able to fool someone. Although it's far harder than both gold and platinum so you'd be found out right away.

"Is this fine?"

"This is good. How many can you make?"

He eventually took five of them and after feeling out their weight, nodded.

I would think five of them would be quite heavy...

He is an experienced adventurer after all.

"Then, until the next."

Talhand gave me a nod and turned towards Roxy.

"Talhand you be carefull."

"You take care of yourself Roxy."

"Of course."

Talhand laughed.

Roxy smiled as the two friends parted.

Part 4

And so our family vacation ended without incident.

Thinking back on it, all I did was work, but it was a good trip.

I pray this was a good experience for the children and will help encourage them.

Saying it like that really doesn't suit me.

I hope they all grow up well.

Chapter 19

Talhand The Clifftop

Part 1

『Talhand The Clifftop』 was the 37th of 51 siblings.

He was born to an ordinary Dwarf family and was constantly surrounded by his brothers and sisters.

51 of them.

Of course, they didn't all share the same mother.

Something not generally known is that in the Dwarf village, all children of the same generation are all grouped together.

I guess you could liken it to a school, but from the moment they are born, they are considered siblings until death.

And so all the children live as siblings, any disparity in wealth is lost, and they can eventually transition smoothly into positions of responsibility within the village.

And among their siblings, someone will be the chief, some will be servants, and others will marry each other.

Of course, that's simply the state of this village.

Dwarves outside the village have no such custom.

Anyhow, Talhand was raised among several tens of people as siblings.

He was a normal child.

He was interested in rock and iron, he liked the smell of alcohol, and he admired blacksmiths and builders.

The only thing that might have stood out was that he seemed to like the men more than the women.

That aside, among his siblings there was one who was particularly popular.

His little brother, the 38th of 51.

His name was 『Godbard of the Splendid Heavenly Peak』 .

Godbard had a particular talent.

Once Dwarf children are of age, they are taught blacksmithing and crafts, as well as simple Earth Magic.

And amongst those, Godbard far outshone the rest.

He could use the hammer to create steel as hard as the adults, he could craft ornaments splendid enough to make you doubt your eyes, and if you showed him a building, he could immediately fix its weak points.

Dwarves live longer than humans.

Around the time that Godbard's talent was discovered, there were still those who had lived through the Laplace War.

“He's the spitting image of the late Ore God,” they proclaimed.

At their recommendation he was selected as a candidate for the next Ore God and was given preferential treatment.

The other children also came to recognise him as their future leader.

It was at that point that Talhand also began to show changes.

He lost interest in smithing and crafts.

Because he knew that no matter how hard he tried, nothing he made would ever outshine Godbard.

He wasn't comparing himself to Godbard.

The adults never even looked at anything anyone other than Godbard made, so there was never even any comparison.

Did Talhand want to be number one?

No.

That wasn't it.

Then did he resent the respect shown to Godbard?

That wasn't it either.

Talhand and Godbard were quite close.

In fact, Godbard was one of his first friends.

Talhand's first love was Godbard.

When he heard that Godbard was to be the next Ore God, he was happy.

And so, Talhand thought of how he could be helpful to Godbard.

How he would make up for his deficiencies and become his right-hand man.

The conclusion he reached was Magic.

Especially, Water and Wind Magic which the Dwarves considered worthless.

The previous Ore God was a God Class Earth Mage, and using the stone he created, produced a legendary sword.

But it's also said that the reason he was able to create such an amazing sword was because of the Water and Wind talents of the Elves.

Blacksmithing is done with more than just earth and fire.

To grow fire, you need wind. To cool steel, you need water.

It's not an incorrect philosophy, but the adults of the village refused to acknowledge it.

Tradition and formality have prevented previous generations of Dwarves from excelling at Wind and Water Magic.

They would give all kinds of reasons to prevent Talhand from learning Wind and Water Magic.

In actual fact, Talhand was far better at Earth Magic than Wind or Water.

But Godbard had said, "I think it's a great idea. Those adults' heads are too hard."

Those words gave Talhand determination and further flared his admiration of Magic.

And so Talhand separated from the norm.

And because of that, he became an object of scorn among some of his siblings.

According to them, any Dwarf who couldn't work a forge, couldn't be considered a man.

And Magic should only be used to loosen bedrock, anything used in smithing should be birthed by nature.

And under their contempt, Talhand slowly advanced his studies.

It was all for the sake of Godbard.

When he became the new Ore God, he would definitely need Talhand's strength.

That's what he believed.

Even when they criticised him, ostracised him, and he became known as an eccentric madman, he continued to believe.

And then the day arrived.

The day Godbard became the Ore God.

In accordance with the succession ritual, the Ore God must craft five swords.

And for each sword he creates, he selects those he can most rely on.

The Ore God himself selects his wife and friends, those who will help him lead the village in the future.

Talhand of course, nominated himself.

He'd been training himself for this day.

But to his surprise, Godbard didn't select him.

He selected those in the village who possessed skill and his lover... And that was fine.

But his last selection was one who had berated Talhand as a lunatic, a stubborn old man.

Talhand objected.

"As if I could stand such foolishness, I worked this hard for you!" he said.

But Godbard replied,

"Can you make an actual sword?"

And of course Talhand answered,

"Of course I can, give me a chance."

Godbard gave a bitter look, but he consented.
The stubborn old man and Talhand.
They would both forge a sword in competition.
And to assure impartiality, Godbard proclaimed that only those he deemed worthy were to participate.
They gathered from all around to join.

Talhand was baffled.
He had trained his Water and Wind Magic for this moment.
But since childhood, he had done very little smithing.
He could count the number of times he made a sword on his hand.
He was at a massive disadvantage.

“Wait! I wanted to help you make swords!”

And to his plea,

“Someone who can’t make their own sword, couldn’t possibly understand my design. Those who don’t understand can’t assist me.”

He was denied.
He didn’t understand.
He thought there was nobody who could understand Godbard better than himself.
So why...

And so still confused, he duelled with no plan...
And lost.

And so with eyes drilling holes in his back, he left the scene.
The next day, during the succession ceremony, Talhand left the village.

Part 2

After that, Talhand continued traveling as an Adventurer.

He was almost always alone.

After the incident with Godbard, he could no longer bring himself to trust people.

After being ostracised for so long, he had no idea how to interact with others.

And his sexual inclination didn't help with that.

His smithery was at the base level a Dwarf should have, but the Magic that he had spent most of his time on was only at a reasonable level.

It only went as far a reasonable.

So he clad himself in armour and had no choice but to resign himself to something of a Magic Knight role.

But he still didn't think being a solo adventurer was that difficult of a task.

When Talhand was raised to B rank, a certain person took notice of him.

Elinalise Dragonroad.

At first, she had her eyes on his body.

She felt like eating up a Dwarven youth.

But with Talhand's sexuality, he had no interest in her.

And no amount of seduction could change that.

And when he finally got tired of her advances, he told her he was gay.

Elinalise stared at him mouth agape and then proceeded to laugh.

Talhand wasn't too pleased with that.

But he knew he would be able to part ways with the lascivious Elf.

But Elinalise never left him.

He had no idea why.

Maybe she thought she could stay out of trouble by following him around.

After that the two of them teamed up a quite a number of times.

The abilities of the fast warrior Elinalise and the heavily armoured Mage Talhand meshed well together.

He still found her irritating, but for some odd reason, it wasn't an uncomfortable sensation. Maybe because her common sense was bound by strict rules.

Although neither of them talked about forming an official Party.

But the appearance of a single boy changed that.

Paul Greyrat.

He managed to bring together the scattered Elinalise, Talhand, Gisu and Ghyslaine and form a party.

The 『Black Wolf's Fang』 .

Their combination caused quite a stir, but that's a story for another time.

The members of 『Black Wolf's Fang』 were all those ejected from their own societies. And although none of them matched with Talhand, they were all faithful to their desires.

Paul was especially creative in his wild thoughts.

When he heard of Talhand's preferences, he simply laughed it off and exclaimed, "So I get the women, Elinalise gets the men, and if you take whoever's left, nobody gets wasted."

Paul was an easy to understand kid and his every action would leave you wanting to sigh.

Although it didn't seem as if he acted without restraint.

He possessed some amount of common sense.

Even when he was publicly labelled a playboy, he continued to live how he wanted as if he couldn't care less.

Paul's way of life opened Talhand's eyes.

Paul's actions gave the 『Black Wolf's Fang』 quite the bad reputation, but it was fun nonetheless.

Whenever Paul did something befitting of his name, he would give a hearty Dwarven laugh. Talhand's feelings for Paul, while similar to love, were decidedly different.

It was most likely faith.

For the first time in his life, he had companions he could trust.

But that trust was broken.

Zenith joining the party had destroyed his reliance on them.

Paul, who had run around uninhibited until now, began to act with common sense to conform with what Zenith expected.

You could consider it Paul growing as a person.

But Paul made one mistake right at the end.

The upheaval caused by Paul's marriage to Zenith left a scar on each of the members hearts.

In hindsight, it may have only been a small thing.

But it resolved Talhand to never join another party again.

After that, Talhand continued on alone, and before long, the Fitoa Annihilation Event occurred.

He was reunited with Elinalise, met Roxy, and together with the two of them, his aversion towards groups diminished...

But his sentiment didn't extend to Paul.

He met back up with Paul on his return from the Magic Continent.

And the man he met, was no longer the unruly child he once knew.

He was a man, a father, desperately searching for his family.

Talhand knew he had changed, that he had grown up.

He first met Paul's son in the Begarrito Continent.

Rudeus Greyrat.

He had assumed he would be some lazy arrogant brat just like his father, but he was a surprisingly dependable kid.

But seeing how Paul had matured it wasn't all that strange.

Paul and Rudeus.

Seeing the two of them caused Talhand's chest to tighten.

He didn't know why.

And then Paul died.

It was too quick of an end.

He received quite the shock.

But seeing the far greater impact it had on Rudeus, he was hesitant to let it show.

So he drank his sorrows away as calm as he always was.

After that he left the Begarito Continent and met Paul's son's family.

The son of the flagrant womaniser Paul, had actually started his own family.

So after erecting a grave for Paul and having a drink in his honour, he left Sharia on a journey.

It was then that something inside Talhand was over.

Something that had been with him since he became an Adventurer.

Part 3

One day, in his emptiness, a thought came to Talhand.
That he should learn to blacksmith.

He couldn't tell why he thought that.

But throughout his journey towards the Asura Kingdom, he took up jobs in smithies alongside his work as an Adventurer as training.

Because of Gisu's gambling, he had lost most of his fortune.

And to earn a little more money, when he reached the Millis Continent, he took a break from his travels.

He started smithing with all of his magic at his disposal.

Fire, Earth, Water and Wind.

He made swords, he made gauntlets, he made shields, he made swords, he made armour, he made helmets, and he made swords.

And through that, he somehow began to understand what Godbard had said to him all those years ago.

Some things just can't be conveyed through words. The tempo, the timing, the force, he began to get a feel for all these things.

His skill rapidly increased.

The intricacies of Godbard's forgery were burning in his mind.

And his knowledge from his time as an adventurer about what kinds of equipment outperformed others played a big part.

The way he used Magic was far from that his village taught.

Eventually, people who would buy his wares appeared.

The Rudo Mercenaries.

Because he was acquainted with Rudeus, that branch became his sponsor.

And because of that, eventually he was able to set up his own shop.

But, as always, his actions didn't have any purpose to himself.

His part time Adventures, playing teacher to apprentices, none of it had any meaning.

What finally changed that was when Rudeus brought his entire family over from Sharia. Paul's son, could stand on the same level as the Latria house.

When he saw that, he knew.

He finally understood.

That he had to return to his village.

That he had to overturn the decision on that day.

That's why he was smithing.

Part 4

After getting the rod of black rock from Rudeus, Talhand returned to his store. He had always thought that if he had the ability, that was the kind of stone he would make. What was once a dream, was now possible through all the training he had put himself through.

“ ... ”

The first step was to powderise the rock from Rudeus with hammer and Magic. Then mix in iron sand and heat it. And using Earth and Wind Magic to achieve temperatures unimaginable with a conventional furnace, raise the heat.

Both the Shingane and the Tamahagane[†]would be made of Rudeus's rock and the iron sand.

The ratio would be different, but the basic process the same. He could have used Red Dragon scales or Hydra bones to produce an even stronger sword, but Talhand wouldn't use any of that. There wouldn't be any point.

He began to slowly forge the sword, and after an entire night without rest, he began the tempering process. Slowly but surely, he poured the epitome of his magic and willpower into the sword.

The result: a single blade.

It was a hard black sword.
It had no special decorations and no special effects.

But Talhand was satisfied. He made a scabbard, wrapped it in a first class cloth, and placed it on his back.

After putting the remaining black rocks in his bag, he set off from Millishion.

His destination: the Dwarf village.

Part 5

Even after so long, nothing had changed about the Dwarf village.

The village was built from stone at the base of a cliff.

The sound of hammering iron could be heard even through its thick stone walls.

Talhand made it through the entrance without much difficulty.

He was no longer part of the village, but he was still a Dwarf.

Dwarves regularly left and entered the village so the watch wasn't particularly mindful.

“ ... ”

In the side of the cliff there was a huge hole and out of it came a system of pulleys.

Half naked men drenched in sweat carried coal and ore out from the mine and the women brought massive sacks of steamed potatoes on both shoulders to the rest stop near the outside.

Talhand felt a sense of nostalgia at the sight.

As if time had been frozen from the moment he left the village.

The only thing that had changed was the number of people he didn't recognise.

Although he drew some quizzical gazes walking about, the amount that looked at him with disdain were few.

Most of them didn't know him or didn't think anything of him.

Talhand didn't let any of that bother him and headed straight for the Patriarch's residence. he only had one aim.

“...It's been some time 『Clifftop』 What did you come here for?”

But of course, there were those that knew him.

Standing in his way was one of his brothers.

The man who had laughed at Talhand all those years ago and was chosen as the confidant of the Ore God.

“I’ve come to see the Ore God.”

“Know your place, as if he would meet with one such as yourself.”

“ ... ”

Talhand said nothing and removed the sword from his back.

He unfastened the cloth and the instant he removed the sword from its scabbard, the man was shocked breathless.

Because underneath was a jet black sword blade.

So dark it was as if it would absorb all light, but it wasn’t eerie, instead it possessed a kind of enlightening arrogance.

It was a thing of beauty.

“Just what is this...?”

“I forged it.”

“Impossible...”

In Dwarven smithing, swords showed everything.

An excellent Dwarf could produce an excellent sword.

Therefore, he couldn’t believe that it was something Talhand created.

“I am here to present.”

The Ore God is renowned throughout the world as the greatest blacksmith and is the pride of the Dwarven race.

And as such, whenever a fellow blacksmith produces a work to a degree of quality, he has an obligation to inspect it.

Of course, anything not up to standard would immediately be turned away by any inspecting Dwarves.

And the man in front of him was doing just that.

“ ... ”

He didn’t like Talhand.

But swords didn't lie.

The black sword in front of him possessed no special features and wasn't crafted with any special techniques.

But, it was hard. Extremely hard.

No half hearted battle could damage it.

That made it an excellent blade.

Any who calls himself a dwarf couldn't lie about this sword.

"I give you permission. You may proceed, Talhand Clifftop."

"I give my thanks, Dotol Flamesteel."

Talhand recalled his old brother's name, bowed his head and resealed his sword.

On his path to the Ore God, Talhand encountered the same thing many times.

But when they saw the sword, none barred his path.

Part 6

The memories of the esteemed 『Ore God』 Godbard regarding Talhand had somewhat faded.

It was only natural.

Many years had passed since Talhand had left the village.

“You’ve grown old, Talhand.”

“Speak for yourself.”

“I thought you would have died in the middle of nowhere a long time ago.”

“I had intended to.”

The two exchanged only a short greeting.

Off to Godbard’s side was his wife and right-hand man.

With the return of the village’s biggest madman, their vigilance was plain to see.

But there was no such thing between Talhand and Godbard.

Talhand had decided to face Godbard with a calm heart.

“ ... ”

“ ... ’

But Godbard didn’t have any intention to talk.

There was so many things that could be said.

About his experiences outside the village.

But words were unnecessary.

Talhand wordlessly took out the sword.

Godbard, still silently, removed it from its scabbard and marvelled at the blade.

“...Hoo.”

Godbard’s response was overflowing with admiration.

He brought the sword up to his face to study.

“This blade holds great faith... There is neither wavering nor naivety, but the inexperience can be spotted. Given the same materials and construction, I could craft a better blade.”

Talhand smiled.

Of course he was happy.

No matter how hard Talhand had worked at smithing in these last few years, he couldn't catch up to the Ore God who had been diligently studying for over a hundred years.

That much was obvious.

“...Haha.”

“What's so funny?”

But that's not why.

That wasn't why at all.

“So you want to know the materials and construction?”

“Of course. It's a curious sword.”

Explaining the materials and construction behind presented swords was not a rare occurrence.

To place a reason on why swords are ever even presented, It would be to leave behind the method of creation.

What materials were used, how it was made and the thought behind it.

There are many who want to leave behind such things in history.

“The base material was a rock created through Earth Magic.

It was ground up and mixed with iron sand.

And I melted it with a combination of Fire and Wind Magic.

After that, I forged and tempered it like any other sword and cooled it with Water Magic.”

“A stone made from Earth Magic...”

Those words caused Godbard to suddenly remember something.

He had heard that method before.

Years ago, a crazy friend had told him about it over and over.

“Is this payback?”

“No. I simply thought to settle our score.”

“...Did you think that, once I saw this sword, I’d tell you to come back?”

“No. You’ve already told me what I wanted to hear. That’s more than enough.”

That Godbard could create a better sword.

With that alone, he was satisfied.

He could feel a weight lifted off his shoulders.

Of course, with the same materials, and the same method, he could create a better sword. But without Magic, you wouldn’t be able to melt or break the stone, and no normal water could be used to cool it at that temperature.

And so, without someone able to use such Magic to a sufficient level...

Although, the genius in front of him, even without Talhand’s method, could probably come up with some way to skilfully refine the stone.

“So, this 『Stone』 , did you craft it yourself?”

“...No. The son of an old friend created it for me.”

He pulled out the three rods of rock from his backpack and lined them up in front of Godbard.

Godbard picked up one of the rocks and felt its weight.

He tried to break it in half to get a look at the cross section, and when he couldn’t do that, he pulled out a hammer and attempted to smash it, but couldn’t even manage a dent.

He was baffled at the hardness of the rod.

He suddenly got excited at the thought of using the rock to make something.

A smile floated to his face.

Talhand nodded, satisfied with the reaction.

Godbard was still as easy to read as he was in his childhood.

“Several days from now the one who made those will be coming to request an audience.”

“...”

“Would you be willing to meet with him?”

Talhand sounded somewhat fond speaking of Rudeus.

He had now achieved his goal.

He had delivered his message.

Now all he had to do was wait for the man who gave him his task.

“He might look somewhat unreliable, and he’ll probably bring with him some unreasonable request...

But he’s a man with guts. You won’t lose anything meeting him.

I’ll swear it on that sword.”

Godbard eyed the sword and stones.

His wife and confidant by his side seemed to have their own thoughts but decided against voicing them.

Talhand was far beyond their expectations.

Probably partially due to the magician that made the stones.

Their curiosity was peaked.

“Fine then. His name?”

“Rudeus Greyrat.”

“Understood.”

Godbard etched that name into his mind.

Once Talhand was sure of it, he stood up.

It was only a spoken promise, but that was more than enough.

Godbard wasn’t one to break his promises.

Once, Talhand may not have thought that way, but what he did back then, was no broken promise.

Only Talhand's inexperience.

"You're leaving?"

"Yes."

"After your display, nobody would have any complaints with you staying."

"I have a shop in Millishion. I'll probably be there as long as I live."

With those parting words, Talhand left the Ore God's residence.

While he had been inside, it had already been surrounded by his once siblings.

Their sharp gazes not hiding their desire to scrutinise him.

"Excuse me, but I'm going through."

They opened a path where he walked.

And among those eyes filled with bewilderment and scorn, Talhand headed for the exit.

Nobody called back to him.

Nobody chased after him.

But Talhand's steps were light and his heart was clear.

The curse had finally been undone.

The fact that the Ore God traded his loyalty to the Dragon God for a large amount of rocks was a story for another time.

[The God Residing in the Holy Land of Sword]

Chapter 20Sword God: Jino Britts

Chapter 21: In the Meantime

Chapter 22: Nina Fariono

[The Moment Aisha Greyrat Stop Being a Maid]

(These controversial chapters were removed from the web novel)

Chapter 23

The Tale

Part 1

Long, long time ago, there was a boy name Ars.

Ever since very little, he was strong-willed and strong bodied.

Sadly, his parents both had passed away before he could remember.

Not only did he live a distant, rural village, but his household was among the poorest of the poor.

But Ars felt blessed.

Because Ars had a smart and capable brother, and the villagers were generous to the orphans.

Helpfully, Ars earned many jobs due on account of his incredible strength.

Most importantly, he had a girl he loved.

Because of a chronic condition, she had long been bedridden. She was told that she won't live long.

Every day after work, Ars would always drop by the girl's windowsill and chat with her.

To Ars, this was most important, irreplaceable part of his day.

The girl didn't have long to live.

But Ars knew no other way to help her.

Truth be told, the girl herself knew that her time was short.

Thus the girl never made any selfish request, only eagerly looking forward to the moments she spent chatting with Ars.

Ars thought everyday would be spent like this, for the remainder of her short life.

But one day, the girl was lying flat on her bed, staring toward the outside sky.

The sky was a strange purple.

"Ars, have you heard? The sky was once a beautiful blue, before the Demon Lord appeared."

Ars had heard of this before.

Long ago, long before Ars was born, the Demon Lord have already existed.

One day, to conquer the human world, the Demon Lord prepared an invasion force.

The Demon Lord conquered half the world. He even changed the color of the sky on a whim.

"Even if only once, I'd like to see that blue sky before I die."

The girl said.

Since Ars met her, this was the first time the girl made a "selfish" request.

No, not really selfish.

More like an offhand comment, an impossible dream.

Ars knew also, that the comment was offhand.

Not truly a request to Ars.

But this girl was looking ever more frail than usual.

A look of defeat on her over an impossible dream.

In that moment Ars made up his mind.

The girl would see the blue sky before her death.

But despite his strength, Ars was but a peasant.

Lacking both knowledge and wisdom.

Of course, he had no idea how to turn the sky blue.

"Brother, I want to turn the sky blue. How do I do that?"

So he decided to ask his brother.

A few years older, their parents were able to afford his brother's education when they're still alive.

If there's a problem, just ask Brother.

"Em..."

Brother racked his brain about Ars' question.

It was a difficult question even for Ars' brother.

After thinking for a while, the brother answered,

"Since it's the Demon Lord that made the sky purple, if the Demon Lord was defeated, the sky would probably return to how it was."

Ars made up his mind to face the Demon Lord and started to packing.

Realizing Ars' actions, the brother rushed to add,

"Brother, the Demon Lord is an terrifying existence. To even just approach him, you'll probably be destroyed to pieces."

"Still, I must go."

No hesitation in his words, so the brother gave up on dissuading him.

Once Ars made up his mind, he won't listen.

"You will never reach the Demon Lord, if you go in blind. First, you should travel to our country's capital. I'll draw a map for you, get you a new pair of boots, and food for the road."

The brother did his best to prepare Ars for his journey.

Ars wasn't one to abandon his goal half way.

Still, the Demon Lord was an overwhelming existence.

He probably won't make it back alive.

It's a death wish.

But at least, he could keep Ars alive a little longer.

Thus, Ars began his journey.

Wielding a map, wearing new boots, and on his sash sheathed his late father's dagger...

He left behind the village of his love ones...

Part 2

Through the wilderness, over the mountains, Ars finally arrived at Capital City.

First time in his life, Ars witnessed a city and a crowd so large.

Seeing that's before him, Ars had an idea.

All he needed to do is ask anyone, and he'd have his answer.

"Defeat the Demon Lord? Just head to the Castle. In times like these, they could use all the help they could get."

Someone said to him.

Accordingly, Ars headed to the castle.

Ars had never seen a building so large.

"I want to defeat the Demon Lord."

He said at the entrance, and Ars received permission for an audience with the King.

The King sat on his dark grey throne, greeting each visitor, but he was shocked when it came to Ars' turn.

"Why? You're but a child!"

"Child I may be, but I wish to defeat the Demon Lord. Please tell me where he lay."

"And what would a child like you to do? Go home."

A knight stood in audience said,

"War is a place for adults. It is for protecting children, like you, that we're here."

Other adults in the room murmured in agreement.

You're but a boy.

You belong at home, not on the battlefield.

No matter how many times Ars shouted, "I'll defeat the Demon Lord!" No one heeded him.

Only the Soothsayer said this,

"Find the Five Sages. Certainly they will be of help to you. But you must not challenge the Demon Lord, before you find the Five Sages!"

Hearing the Soothsayer's words, Ars began his search for the Five Sages.
It was a long, long journey.

Part 3

Ars continued his journey.

He really didn't have any idea on where to go.

But Ars truly believed he could find him.

Thus with everyone he met, he asked for the Sages' whereabouts, and went.

Then, he finally found him.

Across the grass plains, in a cavern by a river, Ars first found his Sage.

One with mystical eyes and silver-green hair.

Littered around him were shields of the colors of his hair.

"Hello, Sage."

"Child of man, hello."

"My name is Ars."

"I'm Szilard, the Second Sage. I live only for conviction."

"I have my own reasons, but I must defeat the Demon Lord, can you lend me your power?"

"My apologies, but I'm very busy. Very, very busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm making shields for children of a distant future. These would definitely protect them when the time comes."

The Sage looked at Ars and said.

"May I ask, child of man, why do you wish to defeat the Demon Lord?"

"For a person important to me, I want to return the blue sky."

"Ah, you have conviction! Then I shall lend my shield to you. It'll definitely protect you too."

"Thank you, Sage."

After receiving Sage's shield, Ars continued his journey.

He still didn't have any idea on where to go.

But Ars truly believed he could find him.

Thus with everyone he met, he asked for the Sages' whereabouts, and went.

Then, he finally found him.

He found his second at the northmost edge of the continent.

One with sharp eyes and silver hair.

In the depths of a freezing, snow-covered forest, he was building a big, big ship.

"Hello, Sage."

"Child of man, hello."

"My name is Ars."

"My name is Perugius, the Third Sage. I live only for loyalty."

"I have my own reasons, but I must defeat the Demon Lord, can you lend me your power?"

"My apologies, but I'm very busy. Very, very busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm making a boat for children of a distant future. It would definitely become useful when they need to travel to a place far away."

The Sage looked at Ars and said.

"May I ask, child of man, why do you wish to defeat the Demon Lord?"

"For a person important to me, I want to return the blue sky."

"Ah, you are loyal! Then I shall lend my boat to you, because the Demon Lord is at a place far away."

After receiving Sage's ship, Ars continued his journey.

He still didn't have any idea on where to go.

But Ars truly believed he could find him.

Sometimes he walked on foot, sometimes he traveled by boat, with everyone he met, he asked for the Sages' whereabouts, and went.

Then, he found him again.

He found his third high in the mountains.

One with dark eyes and silver-black hair.

He wielded a great hammer, forging steel over an anvil.

"Hello, Sage."

"Child of man, hello."

"My name is Ars."

"My name is Chaos, the Fourth Sage. I live only for the pursuit."

"I have my own reasons, but I must defeat the Demon Lord, can you lend me your power?"

"My apologies, but I'm very busy. Very, very busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm making swords for children of a distant future. Because they would definitely wish to live."

The Sage looked at Ars and said.

"May I ask, child of man, why do you wish to defeat the Demon Lord?"

"For a person important to me, I want to return the blue sky."

"Ah, so you have a pursuit! Then I shall lend my sword to you. With this, even the Demon Lord may be slayed."

After receiving Sage's sword, Ars continued on his journey.

He still didn't have any idea on where to go.

But Ars truly believed he could find him.

At times on foot, he was forced to defend himself with the sword, with everyone he met, he asked for the Sages' whereabouts, and went.

Then, he found him again.

He found the fourth on a lonely island in the middle of the sea.

One with fierce eyes and silver-blue hair.

He's crafting a large sheet of leather into a bracelet.

"Hello, Sage."

"Child of man, hello."

"My name is Ars."

"My name is Maxwell, the Fifth Sage. I live only for love."

"I have my own reasons, but I must defeat the Demon Lord, can you lend me your power?"

"My apologies, but I'm very busy. Very, very busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm making bracelets for children of a distant future. Because the wicked would definitely strike out at them."

The Sage looks at Ars and he said.

"May I ask, child of man, why do you wish to defeat the Demon Lord?"

"For a person important to me, I want to return the blue sky."

"Ah, so you understand love! Then I shall lend my shining bracelet to you. May it protect you from the wicked."

After finding four sages.

Ars continued his journey.

But the last Sage was nowhere to be found. No one knew where he was; no one knows who he was.

Slowly, Ars began to think to himself.

Why, maybe the last Sage doesn't exist at all.

The first Sage he met said he was the Second Sage.

Then, maybe I couldn't find the First Sage in the first place.

Regardless, Ars continued his search.

Desperately searching for the Sage.

But he could not be found.

Ars couldn't find the last Sage.

But Ars already had the sword, shield, and bracelet.

He also had a boat to reach the Demon Lord.

Seeing all that he had obtain, Ars couldn't help but ponder,

"Maybe just with these, I can defeat the Demon Lord."

How terrible.

Without finding the Five Sages, Ars headed toward the Demon Lord.

He had already forgot what the Soothsayer once told him.

Part 4

The Demon Lord lived in a terrifying place.

Surrounded by poison marshes, it is impossible to approach with normal means.

Even after crossing the marshes, it's infested with unseen monsters, giant and ferocious, and demons beckoning for your fall.

But because of the boat, Ars easily crossed the marshes.

When attacked by monsters, he had his sword and shield.

The shield was incredibly sturdy, even the monster's teeth and claws failed to cause Ars any harm.

The sword was incredibly sharp, even with the bare minimum of his strength, Ars could cut them in half.

Sometimes, a demon would whisper, "with this sword, shield, and boat, even becoming king is not a dream.", but it went unheard.

Because his bracelet can ward evil, it protected Ars from the demons' whispers of temptation.

Finally, Ars arrived before the Demon Lord's castle.

The Demon Lord's castle was even greater than man's, cloaked in an eerie darkness.

"Uhahaha! How daring of you to show up here, human child! What is your purpose?"

The Demon Lord was a terrible beast of gigantic proportions, with a large mouth and purple hair.

"For a person important to me, please return the sky back to normal."

"Impossible! I really like this purple sky! Uhahaha!"

The Demon Lord would not listen.

The Demon Lord wouldn't understand what an important person is in any case.

"Then I must defeat you!"

Ars challenged the Demon Lord.

Wielding his sword, shield, and bracelet, Ars lunged confidently at the Demon Lord.

But the Demon Lord was unexpectedly agile.

As if foreseeing the future, he dodged Ars' sword.

Untouchable no matter how Ars striked.

"Uhahaha, can't touch me! Can't touch me! Not even close! Now it's my turn!"

Smiling, the Demon Lord punched Ars.

Ars tried to use his shield to block the Demon Lord's enormous fist.

"Gahh!"

Yet, even so. In the next moment, the Demon Lord grabbed Ars' shield and tossed it aside.

Pressed against the wall, Ars felt the full brunt of the punch, and panicked.

Even the sword and shield the Sages lend him were useless against the Demon Lord.

"Uhahaha! I'll smash you to pieces. I'll eat you from head to toe! I bet you taste delicious!"

The giant Demon Lord approached.

Ars couldn't help but run.

Even with a strong will, against the first opponent to ever send him into a panic, Ars couldn't continue the fight.

Tossing aside his sword and shield, removing his bracelet, he managed to escape from the Demon Lord. Ars had lost all his equipment.

Part 5

Ars escaped from the Demon Lord's castle.

The miasma from the poison marshes slowly ate away at Ars' flesh.

But another poison was sapping Ars' heart.

"I ran away, even though there's an important person waiting for me."

This poison was "defeat."

Ars was distraught, walking slumped and aimlessly.

Even with the sword and shield, he couldn't defeat the Demon Lord.

Tears fell from his eyes, drop by drop they wetted the earth.

Without his bracelet, demons that fed on sadness could approach him.

As they taste those tears falling from Ars' eyes, they whispered,

"Tiny hero, what's wrong? Why do the tears keep falling?"

"I can't beat the Demon Lord."

"But that's only natural, the Demon Lord is too strong, and you are just a boy."

"I want to return the sky to normal."

"It's impossible, you're a helpless boy."

"Then what should I do?"

"Nothing you could do. You're tiny and weak. You can't do anything."

Becoming even more distraught from the demon's whispers, Ars approached the edge of marsh.

Deciding whether to jump into the poison marshes.

If he jumped in, Ars' tiny body would certainly disintegrate in an instant.

But Ars had already gave up.

At the edge of the poison marsh, he readied himself to jump.

Just as he was about to jump, he saw a peculiar house by the marsh's shore.

A strange house. shape of a turtle shell.

"What is that? Do you know anything about that house?"

But in that moment, the demon had already disappeared.

No matter where he looked, it's nowhere to be found.

Unexpectedly, a holy aura surrounds the area.

The aura could have only come from that house.

That must be where the Sage lives.

Thinking that, Ars hesitantly walked toward the house.

"Excuse me."

"Child of man, hello. What's wrong? This is no place for a human child."

Inside is someone with gentle eyes and silver-red hair.

"My name is Ars. Even though I wanted to return the color of the sky, I failed to defeat the Demon Lord."

"I'm a man without name or place, the last Sage. I live only for my mission."

These words reminded Ars.

He was to find the Five Sages.

He mustn't challenge the Demon Lord before then.

Remembering so, an inexplicable courage flooded out.

It wasn't impossible. He made a mistake.

"I'm Ars. Last Sage, to defeat the Demon Lord, can you lend me your power?"

"My apologies, but I'm very busy. Very, very busy."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm gathering strength for children of a distant future. Because they have an enemy that they must defeat."

The Sage looks at Ars and he said.

"May I ask, child of man, why do you wish to defeat the Demon Lord?"

"For a person important to me, I want to return the blue sky."

"Ah, so you have a mission! But that wish, was it really for someone important to you?"

"Of course. She wants to see the blue sky."

"Then, I will lend you a small bit of power. Use it to defeat the Demon Lord."

Then, Ars borrowed the power of the first, but also the last, Sage.

Even that small amount, it was without a doubt an overwhelming power.

After receiving this power, Ars understood how to properly wield the sword and shield.

And how to strengthen the shine of the bracelet.

And how to make the boat fly.

Ars got on the flying boat and headed toward the Demon Lord Castle.

When he wore the bracelet that was dropped before the castle, it shone brightly.

As if reacting to that shine, the sword and shield flew back into his hands.

"Uhahaha! The child returns! This time I'll definitely eat you! For I love delicious food!"

His second round with the Demon Lord began.

This time, Ars had obtained Power.

When he swung his sword, he could wound the Demon Lord; When he block with his shield, he could send the Demon Lord flying.

With such overwhelming power, the Demon Lord was no longer even a threat.

"Ugh!"

Finally, Ars' sword cut through the Demon Lord, with a final cry it passed away.

A rainbow colored light shone out of the Demon Lord's remains.

As if responding to that light, the sky's colors returned to normal.

Ars looked upwards toward that clear blue sky!

This was what Ars and his loved one searched endlessly for.

Ars wanted to return immediately by the girl's side.

But he cannot.

For he must return all that he borrowed.

First he visited the First, and the Last, Sage, to return his power.

Next he visited the Fifth Sage, to return his bracelet.

Then he visited the Fourth Sage, to return his sword.

And he visited the Third Sage, to return his flying ship.

Finally he visited the Second Sage, to return his shield.

After returning all that he borrowed, he returned to the Capital City. Human's capital city.

The city hosted a grand banquet.

For everyone knew that if the sky had returned to normal, then the Demon Lord must be defeated.

When Ars reached the castle, the king welcomed him with open arms.

"Oh, Ars the Hero! You have returned! You even defeated the Demon Lord! May I bestow to you, both this kingdom and my beloved princess, take my place as king!"

Faced with the King's offer, Ars refused.

An important person waits for me, he said.

But, in appreciation of the Soothsayer's wise words, Ars stayed for a day.

Then, he finally returned to his village.

From when his journey began, it had been a long, long time.

But he won back the blue sky.

It's time to see his loved ones.

He wanted to see her smile.

But welcoming him back to his village, was his brother, sad and downcast.

"Brother, please raise your head up high and see this blue sky. I have defeated the Demon Lord and returned!"

Yet the brother remained distraught.

"And have my loved one see it too. She must be so happy to see the clear blue sky."

Yet, Brother remained unchanged.

Finally, Ars had to ask,

"Brother, why do you look so sad?"

"Brother, well, it's because.. listen, listen carefully. Because, she's gone."

"Who's gone?"

"Your loved one. She passed away this morning."

Hearing this, Ars smiled.

Even though it's lonely, even though it's sad, yet he still smiled.

"It's fine, if it's this morning. Then she definitely saw this blue sky she once dreamt of. She must have died smiling, saying 'what a beautiful sky,' as she slowly drifted away, surely?"

"No, she cried. She cried because she couldn't see you. Even more than the beautiful blue sky, she wanted to see you. She was always crying."

Ars was stunned when he heard this.

He thought finally succeed in fulfilling the wish of his loved one.

But he was wrong.

Her true desire was always be together with Ars.

To treasure the short time before her death.

That was her true desire.

"Ugh..."

Shaken, Ars fell to the ground before his brother.

Lost, tears began to shed.

From then on Ars was always crying.

Because, there's nothing more he could do. He done wrong on the most important thing.

Always crying, always, till his death.

Part 6

"And, The End."

Aisha clapped the book shut.

"..."

"Well, the ending was rather dark. The lesson here is happiness is right by you, but I like happy endings better."

Ars sat on her thighs, staring at the cover.

Of course, not the Ars of the story, but the firstborn son of Greyrat House.

"It was probably set during the First Demon-Human War, based on myths about the hero Ars, but completely different from what I know. Nothing about his companions, and an extra Sage showed up... I guess it's only natural the story got changed a bit."

Even so, Aisha flipped the book open again.

A very old tome.

Far older than any books Greyrat House had.

Even through the jacket was a clear white, it's hard to tell what kind of leather it was made of.

Only that the color reminded her of something. Completely flawless despite the age.

Even though the pages were already worn and torn.

The pages held up pretty well, all things considered, if the book came about near the end of the First Demon-Human War.

Entitled "Story of Ars."

An unpretentious book.

"I only read this because Ars asked, but where did you find this? It's written in the Fight God Language."

"I got it from Orsted-sama."

"What? You took it without asking? No, you shouldn't be doing that."

"I did not! I was visiting with Papa. It caught my eyes, so Orsted said, 'Take it if you like.'"

Ars still looked rather depressed when he spoke.

As if all that occurred, happened to himself personally.

A fairy tale ending where no one won redemption, a bad end.

Being the protagonist's namesake made Ars rather emotionally invested, especially with how Aisha brought the story to life.

"Don't worry. Ars will definitely find happiness~"

"..."

Aisha patted Ars' head as she hugged him.

Whenever Ars felt down, this always seemed to turn him around.

But that was when he was little.

With his tenth birthday approaching, Ars had been increasingly hard to coax.

Today too, his mood failed to improve.

"Aisha-nee."

"What is it?"

Ars asked suddenly.

"The Ars from the story, how could he find happiness?"

"Huh? Well... Even if he stayed with her, she would have died. Unless he gave up on the Demon Lord, and instead ask the Sages for a cure. Then maybe they'll have a happy ending. The Demon Lord of heroic Ars was probably Kishirika-sama. The world won't find peace until Kishirika-sama was defeated, but humanity probably won't go extinct before they lived their lives together."

Aisha answered, nodding.

As expected of myself, what a perfect solution, Aisha thought.

"..."

Only that Ars' mood did not improve.

He furrowed his brow and tightened his mouth.

"Aisha-nee."

"What is it?"

"What is marriage?"

"That is, when two person who loves each other, stay together."

"I mean, what it means exactly?"

"Living under a roof together, eating together, raising a child..."

"How are babbies made?"

"Eh, that? Em... How am I going to explain this..? Maybe white-mama or blue-mama could explain this better..."

Aisha's face flushed slightly when she answered.

I guess the kid is getting to that age.

That thought made her heart drop.

"Aisha-nee. Getting married and making babies. Is that happiness?"

"Probably."

"Really? That is happiness?"

"Well, Onii-chan looks very happy, but I never got married, so I wouldn't~"

"Why not?"

"No prospects. Well, I like Onii-chan... I mean, Ars' papa, but marriage would be a little... inappropriate? We are siblings, after all."

"Oh..."

Ars turned towards Aisha, pouting.

Still atop of Aisha's thighs, he tapped his feets lightly against hers.

"Papa brought up the topic of my marriage."

"Huh?"

"Some royalty in Asura Kingdom, but she'll be much younger than me. It could be arranged if I wanted."

This was the first time Aisha had heard of this.

The boy in front of her is getting engaged.

It's a mere engagement now, but they'll be officially married as soon as they become adults.

Even though he's just a child...

A troublesome child she raised since birth...

"..."

Even so, Aisha could understand.

A royalty of Asura Kingdom would be a relative of Ariel.

A marriage alliance would be ideal way to forge a closer relationship with Rudeus.

If the girl is younger than Ars, she might even be Ariel's daughter herself.

"Ah, well, Ars is the firstborn son, so it's only natural."

"Forcing me into marriage?"

"Don't worry. Just tell papa, 'I don't wanna,' and papa would know what to do. But why would you hate getting married?"

"But I haven't even seen the girl, let alone marry her?"

Aisha took no heed.

She thought he just meant "I want a girl with big breasts!"

But Ars straighten up and looked into Aisha, and said resolutely,

"I want to marry Aisha-nee!"

"Huh? With me?"

Aisha's eyes widen, studying Ars carefully.

Aisha realized Ars was serious.

"Eh... Ara? Please don't. Ars don't want to marry an okaasan like me. Ars would immediately regret it, if we actually get married. You would definitely say, I wish I had married someone younger and such."

"Age doesn't matter. Just look at Norn-nee and Ruijerd, their age gap is even greater!"

"Well, Ruijerd is of Demon Race, so he doesn't look his age."

"So it's okay for Ruijerd to marry someone who will age faster than him?"

"Well... I suppose."

"Then age doesn't matter! I like Aisha-nee."

This was neither a mere joke nor faint praise.

Nor naive words of a child.

At least Aisha thought so.

It wasn't like Aisha never had been confessed to before.

Working with the mercenaries, confessions were a regular occurrence.

Ars right now shared the same look they had.

"... Well."

Aisha studied Ars carefully.

Even though he's still young, in looks he took just after Rudeus.

Not the current Rudeus.

But the Rudeus when they first met.

Now that she thought of it, Rudeus was around Ars' age during their reunion.

Back then during her moment of crisis, Rudeus suddenly came to her rescue.

When found out how she despised him, he hurried to disgust his identity.

He was so cool when rescuing her, yet so sloppy with the disguise. She decided then, it won't be so bad serving someone like that for rest of her life.

And in fact, that was what she did.

But, right now, Ars is the splitting image of Rudeus back then.

"..."

Aisha felt her heartbeat quicken.

No, this felt different from with Rudeus, her heart was throbbing.

A feeling she never felt before, her chest tightened.
How happy would she be to let that feeling take her.

"Uhehe~ Thanks, but we can't."

Aisha restrained herself.

"Why not? Unless, you hate me?"

"Oh no, of course not. Our relationship is like siblings. If we get married, papa and mamas, and grandma would all be against it."

Aisha hugged Ars as she said.

Just as usual.

But unlike the usual, her heart were beating fast, and she hugged Ars even more tightly.

"Even though, I really, really, really like Ars too. I'm very happy~"

Aisha patted Ars' head as she said.

Ars silently accepted her pats.

Anytime something happened, Aisha would hug Ars, and Ars loved to be hugged by her.
Just like they have always done.

"Don't worry. When you grow older, you'll definitely find someone better!"

"Em."

But Ars felt something different from the hug this time.

Why it felt different, he can't say.

But something definitely changed.

"..."

While surrounded by Aisha's scent, Ars felt it. Things won't go back to the way it was anymore.

"... Em."

From that day forth, the relationship between Ars and Aisha began to change dramatically. Their relationship was no longer the same.

Chapter 24

The Opposition

Part 1

Today's work went without a hitch as usual.

All the jobs recently has been related with Vice Captain Ariel.

It was all preparations for developing large teleportation grids all over Asura Kingdom.

This world considers teleportation circles a "forbidden" magical technique.

Nevertheless, Ariel still plans to remove the ban with her prerogative powers and officially set up teleportation circles all over the kingdom.

Of course, Holy Kingdom of Milis strongly objects, and there're protests among her citizens.

Given that the Fittoa Region Teleportation Disaster happened.

Victims of that incident certainly would find contention with said decree.

Of course, Asura Kingdom is no democracy, so it was passed into law despite protests.

On the other hand, such unrest might become breeding grounds for coups.

Since Ariel's life has always been targeted.

Regardless, Ariel was no doubt the best person to publicize it.

Having read the draft of her speech, she made a convincing case.

"A decade has passed since the Fittoa Region Teleportation Disaster, yet recovery remains a distant memory.

How many more decades before we regain those beautiful amber fields?

The Teleportation Disaster took many things from us.

For this, we must come to understand teleportation. We must research it.

To prevent the disaster from reoccurring, we have to understand why it happened. It was for this reason that I decided to remove the ban on teleportation magic. Certainly there'll be objections, and there'll be concerns. Or perhaps within our generation, we would repeat that mistake. But even failure shall become the breeding ground for our success, ushering in an ever more prosperous future for those generations to come."

The draft came out roughly like that.

Effort to bring the detractors to our side.

Ariel is a person of charisma and popularity. Of course, it'll certainly proceed as plans despite any objections.

The biggest challenge is probably the Milis followers.

Since it was the Church of Milis that designated "teleportation magic" as an ultimate forbidden technique.

For this I traveled to the Holy Kingdom of Milis.

I had the ears of the Miko and the Pope.

When I told them about our grand plans for teleportation circles, they looked extremely troubled.

At the minimum, they would not allow it within the Holy Kingdom of Milis.

I supposed plans for within the Milis Kingdom would have to be put on hold. For now, we would only make public the teleportation circles within Asura Kingdom.

After man audiences, I finally received the promise that "although we could not completely silence the opposition, at least the Pope and the Miko will not publically raise objections to the Asura Kingdom."

In exchange many concessions were made, but it couldn't be helped.

It's settled for now.

As a test case, in a remote corner of Fittoa Region, I setup a teleportation circle far from where the royalty might tread.

After repeated experiments, more would be added.

There would be resistance. For example, those that made a living transportation whose livelihood are threatened.

But if they took advantage of the teleportation circles, safety and efficiency would both greatly improve.

Ultimately, it's for the benefit of the people.

Of course, it also comes in handy for the ultimate battle with Laplace.

Orsted seem to know how to use the teleportation circles efficiently.

Anyways, I'm done for the day.

Without a break for so long, I really want to get well rested today at home.

"I'm home~"

With that in mind, I arrive at my doorsteps.

Surrounded by the kids, cuddling with the wives, enjoying a nice meal.

A home filled with love.

"...Eh? No one's home?"

Yet the normally bustling household is unusually quiet.

I suppose, it's only past noon.

Roxy, Lara, Ars, and Sieg are in school.

Sylphy should be grocery shopping.

Eris is walking Lily and Chris.

Aisha is probably with the Mercenaries?

Zenith isn't home, and neither is Jiro.

Looks like Lilia took Zenith somewhere.

Lucy begin attending Asura Royal Academy this year.

Boarding there too, probably.

So she's not home.

So it end up I'm home alone.

Ops, Beat is home.

Watching the house as always, thank you for your hard work.

I get to eat fluffy white rice tonight all due to you too, keeping the pests at bay.

Right, I shall add some fertilizer for you later.

With that in mind, I head upstairs.

"Oh... Oh..."

Suddenly, a voice meagers in from somewhere.

A heavy groan.

I guess someone is home after all.

I follow the origins of the sound upstairs.

And discovered it coming from Aisha's room.

"Ah... Oh..."

As if tormented by a nightmare, a hefty groan.

Is Aisha ill?

"Ah... That's great. Faster..."

Wait, no.

It's that.

The same sound made when I sleep with Roxy and Syphy.

And sometimes when Eris sleeps with me, one I'm quite familiar of.

"..."

This is rather unexpected.

Having some adult fun.

The thought of Aisha in that kind of relationship never crossed my mind.
I'm happy for her, but also a little sad, it's complicated.
Ultimately, Aisha is an adult now, and even as her brother I can tell that she's a beauty.
Not unusual at all for her to meet someone.

Or I might have made a mistake.

Maybe she came down with something, or I misheard, or she's getting a massage.
Or perhaps she's just wrestling, if my imagination may be allowed to run wild!... But
wrestling isn't known in this world.
The possibilities are plenty.

"..."

A little awkward and unexpected, but there's nothing unbecoming about it. Let me settle
down.

I should knock first, to give him a chance to introduce himself.

With Paul gone, it's my responsibility to play father's role for Norn and Aisha. That I settled
on long ago.

I want to see with my own eyes, what kind of person he is.

I'll give him a tough time if he ends up a deadbeat.

It's for Aisha's own good.

But Aisha isn't one to be charmed so easily.

Even if he has some odd habits, he probably won't be a bad guy.

Anyways, I shouldn't get taken up by first impression, but try to figure out his true nature.
... Even though I was never very good at that.

Anyways, I should knock.

Just as I was about to, more noise came from the room.

"Oh, Ars, does it feel good?"

"Em. Yes.... Aisha-nee."

Instantly, I swung open the door.

"Huh!?"

"Wah!?"

Before my eyes is an impossible sight.

Aisha and Ars on the bed together.

Ars below, with Aisha on top.

Both are naked.

Both bodies covered in sweat.

Both spooked like cats, frozen still, eyes bugged out with only their heads twisted back.

"..."

They're wrestling...

Impossible.

Why would they wrestle with nary an underwear? And a particular smell permeates the room. There aren't even any folded chairs around.

That means... it's that.

Aisha and Ars....

"... Eh, oh."

I wish I made a mistake.

I wish Aisha was just giving Ars a massage when I swung open the door.

"Ha, aah, ugh."

Don't know what to say.

What the hell?

... What should I do? How did this happen...?

"Eh, Em, welcome back, Onii-chan... No, this is..."

Aisha wants to say something.

A situation impossible to explain.

But the truth finally dawned on me. I wasn't wrong, they were doing it.

"You two... Right now, shower, get dressed, and see me in the living room."

I managed to blurt out those words before I shut the door.

Just like that, I headed downstairs, arrived at the living room, and collapsed on a chair.

My strength left me.

My heart beats furiously.

My vision narrows.

I wish this was but a dream.

But the sound of rushing about from the second floor only reaffirmed the truth.

My tummy hurts, I want to hurl, my mind is blank.

Part 2

Just as Aisha and Ars were about to enter the bath, Sylphy and Lilia came home. Both were shocked when they saw me, and rushed to ask what happened. When they finally got me talking, I told them what I saw.

Lilia's face turned pale, when she saw I was serious, then flushed. She tried to rush upstairs, but Sylphy stopped her. Sylphy remained calm despite what I said. Calm down, let's talk about this after Roxy and the rest come home, she said. Lilia consented and went to make dinner.

While Aisha and Ars were bathing, Eris came in. As soon as she saw me in the living room, she shouted out, "Who bullied you?" Her reaction reminded me of that time I fought with Paul. All I could do was attempt to calmly explain the situation, which Eris finds unbelievable. But seeing how I look, and the gravity of the situation, Eris kept silent. Lily and Chris took their turn in the bath after Aisha and Ars finished. They got dressed and came to the living room. With their arms crossed and eyes shut, they seated themselves in their respective seats.

Part 3

The family meeting has begun.

Let's start from the beginning and confirm the facts with these two.

When asked, Aisha smartly answered each question.

During this time, Ars never spoken a word.

eyes down, fists tight, he kept his silence.

What they did was confirmed.

According to Aisha, it was merely "practice."

"Yes, Ars-sama is getting to that age. I'm sure Master understand as well, Ars-sama will be quite the playboy. He'll attend the Asura Royal Academy after graduating from Magic University, right? When that happened, he'll find far more opportunities with women. Ultimately, Ars-sama is the firstborn son and have to continue the family's legacy. In order to help him avoid any mishaps, like fulfilling his marital duties, I consent to let him practice."

Aisha said with humbling honorifics.

Spoke like with outsiders present, in a cold, mechanical, and distant tone.

But even more than her tone, the content of her words are even foreboding.

Practice.

Making so light of this, it hits me rather hard.

Even though Aisha and Ars aren't blood siblings, in this house they were always treated as such.

At least in my view.

Of course, in this world, in this country, there are no prohibitions against marriage between close relatives.

Still... Making so light of that, it's not right.

I must admonish them.

Even though I'm not used to scolding people, I must in this case.

They must understand that they shouldn't have done that, and certainly not anymore.

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Where do I even begin..?"

But what could I say?

In this moment Paul's face floats in my mind.

If Paul's here, he would know what to say.

You just can't! He'll definitely yell.

Or would he rather, after getting so stunned, stay mute and gloomy?

I'm the latter.

Really I don't know what to say.

Regardless, this is the crucial moment.

Depending on how the conversation goes, there might be no turning back.

I must carefully, cautiously pick my every word.

Yet, those words just won't come to me.

"Aisha! Do you even understand what you did!?"

Can't hold it in anymore, Lilia berated her.

Ultimately, and from the start, she was the most outraged than anyone else.

"I do. Ars-sama looked like so troubled. So before he get his hands on someone else and commit a grave mistake..."

"That's not I'm talking about!"

"... But mother, didn't you once said? The Master's demands, assent, no matter how distasteful. If so, why was it okay with Master, but not with Ars-sama?"

"That's because..."

Lilia also fell silent.

It's true that Lilia had once prod Aisha into seducing me.

Even though we never brought it up again when it failed...

"That was... Rudeus-sama never intended for that kind of relationship."

"What about when I chose to serve Rudeus-sama, even though he didn't intend for that either?"

"True..."

"Mother, haven't you realize, everything you asked for me, it was for your own sake?"

Lilia was speechless.

It's been long since I seem Lilia hit so hard.

"Of course, I don't begrudge you. Since it was also my wish to serve Master. But this time, I also did it for the good of the Greyrat House. There's no conflict between your goals and mine. There's really no reason for you to begrudge me. You're making a big fuss, don't you think it's for nothing?"

"Aisha... Are you doing this for revenge?"

"No, I did it out of gratitude, not revenge."

Hearing this, Lilia clenched her teeth and drooped her head.

Was that of anguish? Or out of grief?

Either way it's hard to watch.

Aisha puts on a good poker face in reaction.

In any other circumstance, she would be looking so dependable.

Since it's the same look during Mercenary Corp meetings.

It signifies that Aisha is in complete control.

Anticipating what the opponent might say, with a response prepared, and wrapping on the debate with a finishing statement...

"Aisha."

"What is it, Master?"

Even with me, she hasn't lost her cool.

Not a sign of nervousness.

What I'll say next, she has already anticipated it.

What's really going on here?

It doesn't seem like Aisha believes she done anything wrong.

Don't tell me, things are really not as terrible as I imagined?

That's not entirely impossible...

"Don't take that so casually."

"I didn't take it casually. I did my best for Ars-sama. Or are you saying there's a reason why I shouldn't?"

What she was trying to say was,

If you got something to say, just say it!

"Ars is family. He's like a brother to you, just like you and me. In that case... is that really okay?"

"You're mistaken. Master is my king, and Ars-sama my prince. Besides, doing those things with Master, I never ever thought of it as inappropriate. Even if you had made clear that the relationship between you and I are different."

"..."

This breaks my heart.

Was this how Aisha saw me the whole time?

I thought of myself as her brother, yet Aisha merely served me as her master?

Although it's true that she always worked in the house since we reunited in Sharia.

After so many years, I have assumed she no longer harbored such thoughts.

"Ah. Of course I considered everyone family. But, how should I say this, that's just a part of it. Master is my brother, and Ars my nephew, but both are also who I serve. Both aspects of our relationships are important to me."

"..."

She saw right through me and left me speechless.

How do I reach her? Even though I have so much to say, I can't find the words.

Is it because I dislike one-sidedly telling people what's wrong and right?

No. It's because I really can't dig down to the bottom of what is wrong.

Why can't Aisha and Ars do those things?

Why did it hit me so hard?

Why do I find it so revolting?

Why was I so adamant on calling a family meeting?

Who to blame? Who to scold? What shall be done?

I don't know.

In this situation, I can't visualize a way to explain myself clearly. Future Sight be damned.

Someone? Anyone? Convey my feelings for me?

As if begging for help, my eyes shift towards Roxy.

But she just looked downcast and pitiful.

"If only I... realized it earlier..."

She murmured.

No, this unreliable Roxy.

Utterly unhelpful.

It can't be helped. She's clueless in the subject of love.

Then... Eris? No, she's even worse.

I can only count on Sylphy.

"It already happened. It can't be helped."

Aisha suddenly spoke up to break the silence.

"Even though I did it for the sake of Ars-sama and the Greyrat House. Now that I thought about it, I did took it lightly. I was being inconsiderate. Just like Onii-chan said, too casual about it. That was my mistake. I'm sorry."

The mood relaxed somewhat.

Who's responsible for that goes without saying.

Aisha prepares her wrap up.

Taking the initiative to end this meeting.

With those words she can make the curtain calls. My fault, I'll reflect on this.

And finally "I won't do it again."

But I knew well.

Those were mere words.

This meeting only happened because they were sneaky about it.

If it really was for Ars, for the Greyrat House, she could have been upfront about it... Even if she couldn't, she could have consulted someone. She could even received permission for the sexual education.

In other words, she knew it was wrong, and did it anyways.

Even if she agreed to put a stop to it now, nothing guarantee it won't happen again.

Next time, she'll be more careful.

And no one would find out.

Aisha is capable of that.

"In the future, I won't do that with Ars..."

"So I can count you for Sieg too?"

The one that interrupted Aisha was Sylphy.

She have remained silent throughout the family meeting, listening quietly.

Staring with intensity than usual at Aisha.

Before finally spoken.

"Huh?"

"Since you have already enlightened Ars, can I'll leave the necessary education of Sieg to you too?"

What is Sylphy talking about?

That can't happen.

While I was thinking, she peered over and our sights crossed.

Let me handle this, her eyes say.

I'll leave it to her.

"Well, Sieg... is too early?"

"It's fine. Sieg will grow up one day. If it's practice, the earlier the better. Maybe even tonight? Would it be a bother?"

"No... Not a bother, but..."

"Of course, we can leave Clive to you too. Even though he's not of this household, he's still family."

Sweat dropped as Aisha heard such bold statements from Syphy.

Her sight wavered, only lingering for a moment with Ars.

Ars still had his head down.

But sensing Aisha peering over, his head raised a bit.

Their sights connected.

What's going to happen? What do we do?

Accepting the unease in Ars' eyes, Aisha made up her mind.

She raised her head and looked towards Sylphy, smiling, and said,

"Okay, I understand. Then leave the enlightening of Sieg and Clive to me."

As those words left her mouth, someone suddenly kicked off her chair and stood up.

"... You little!"

It was Eris.

Throughout this family meeting, she sat, arms crossed, mouth closed, eyes shut, just listening to the conversation.

But she suddenly opened her eyes, with a clenched fist she trotted towards Aisha, arm raised.

Surprised, Aisha rushed to cover her face.

"Ah...!?"

The blow didn't land on Aisha.

But the one seating beside her, Ars, with his head still hanging low.

Ars flew off his chair and landed against the wall.

His nose bled, but in shock he only stared blankly at Eris.

"You little! How dare you for making Aisha say all these things!"

"Because Aisha-nee said to leave everything to her..."

"What you mean because?"

Eris threw another punch at Ars.

Ars fell to the ground, groaning from the pain.

"I don't remember raising you to be an useless runt."

So agitated as Eris approached Ars.

"I taught you to protect good people! Who taught you that! Throw people under the wheel! Have you feel no shame!"

"Eris-nee, stop!"

Aisha threw herself over Ars to protect him.

"Get off, Aisha! I need to beat some sense back in him!"

Her aura seem suffice to beat both Aisha and Ars to death.

I rushed from behind to restrain Ers.

"Ers, stop! Calm down!"

"How can I be calm? You get it right?"

"Get what?"

I don't follow.

I get that Eris might feel disgraced, but I still don't follow.

"Everything Aisha said, it was all an act."

Sylphy finally left her seat and crossed over.

Using her hands to restrain Eris, Eris obeyed.

Standing before Ars and Aisha, Sylphy said in a kind tone,

"Say, Aisha. You hated the idea of doing this and that with Sieg, and with Clive, right?"

"..."

Aisha fell silent.

Stubbornly hugging Ars.

As if all her clever lies had just been exposed.

"You like Ars, and eventually it turned into that kind of relationship."

"..."

"If you went public with it, Rudeus and Lilia would both be against it, so you kept it quiet?"

"..."

"Or does Aisha just want to try it for once? Maybe that's your real intent?"

"No!"

The one that spoke last wasn't Aisha, but Ars.

"It's not like that! I told Aisha-nee that I like her, and want to marry her, but she refused! Again and again, I told her that I like her, even if just once, yet she still refuse! Yet I still pursue her, until Aisha-nee finally relent... It was me! It was my fault!"

Disregarding the bleeding from his nose, he shouted so desperately.
After listening to him, Sylphy looked once again at Aisha.

"So Aisha, was that the truth?"

"..."

The whole time as Sylphy stared intently at her, Aisha kept her head low.
Finally, she clenched her teeth and looked up.

"It's true! I like Ars!"

"Since when?"

Who asked that?

Might be me, but also might be Lilia or Roxy.

"Since he was born! When I first saw Ars! This child is special to me, from the start I have thought so!"

"..."

"As Ars grew, so did that feeling... But I still tried to restrain myself! After all, we're a decade apart! Not to say that he's the firstborn, thus needs a proper prospect for continuing the Greyrat House legacy! But Ars said me he loves me too!"

I finally saw the whole truth.

In other words, it's an ordinary story of falling in love.

Just that it happened between aunt and nephew.

I have always avoid that kind of relationship with Aisha.

I never intend for it to begin with, but most importantly she's my sister.

It never crossed my mind to see Aisha as my wife.

Perhaps it was my insistence that taught Aisha against that kind of relationship between family.

But, Aisha likes Ars.

Always, she cuddles him, and he relies on her.

Although I know not their frame of mind, when they finally crossed that line, maybe they convinced themselves it's just one time.

But Ars won't abate after finally tasting the goods.

As a man, I knew this well, that's how it always get started.

Thereafter, Aisha could never refuse Ars' demands.

Since she's also willing, she allows her heart to tug her along.

Until these blips of hedonism became commonplace.

"This is not like you, Aisha..."

Roxy with a sigh.

Then Aisha turned toward Roxy and shouted.

"But what was I supposed to do? I really like him! I can't help it! For Ars, I would give anything! I like Ars, I want to marry him..."

Aisha voice whimpered off.

And she began to cry.

Tightly she hugged Ars between her bosom.

A splitting image of Roxy and I, when we reunited on the Begaritt Continent.

"... No, I know that feeling."

Faced with Aisha's heartfelt words, Roxy could only reply.

Not just Ars, Aisha couldn't control herself either.

How very unlike for the normally dependable Aisha.

Was it simply the human desire for siring offsprings?

Even knowing she shouldn't, she couldn't fight against it.

"Onii-chan."

Aisha wiped away her tears and raised her head, with calm eyes she said.

"I'm very sorry for what happened. But I really do love Ars, and Ars me as well. Even if we have to wait until he reach adulthood, please give us your blessings."

The conviction in her voice quieted the room.

Sylphy turned to ask.

"Rudeus, what do you think?"

Am I supposed to decide?

I suppose I did called for this family meeting.

But is it really appropriate for me to decide?

Looking around, the mood reads, "it's fine now, right?"

It's a fact they shouldn't had done that in secret.

Even if they couldn't go public about it, there're other options.

But the feelings between Ars and Aisha are mutual.

Even if Ars is still young, neither party were forced into this relationship.

So what's wrong with permitting their relationship?

No need to continue scolding them here.

The current mood said.

"..."

If I may be generous, their crimes are really not that severe.

Yet somehow, I feel so repulsed from the bottom of my heart.

"No. I refuse."

"Huh?"

The bewildered voice came from Sylphy.

Eh? Did I say something strange?

No, hold on.

Think this through.

Aisha's okay.

To Ars' demands, even though it felt wrong, she consented.

That was her decision to make.

No matter the right or wrong, it was her decision to make.

Even if it was for a mistake, she has already committed to the decision to protect Ars.

But what about Ars?

Can he make the same commitment?

As a man, if he let his lower half make the decisions, he'll just keep repeating the same mistakes.

When that happens, he would allow a momentary bliss overwhelm any thoughts of risk and consequences.

Even I didn't consider all that entails when I married Sylphy.

Now that I thought about it, back when Sylphy and I got married, I was probably in a rush to lock down the girl I was long after. Nothing proud to say about that.

Perhaps, Ars doesn't truly like Aisha, and the relationship was purely physical.

Basically, he just wants to bed someone.

It's not true love, just spur of the moment. That possibility can't be denied.

Not that it's necessarily bad.

Following one's instincts is bad, I certainly couldn't say that.

Even if it was the spur of the moment, they might end up in a more serious relationship later too.

Just that..

Right now, Ars lacks the capacity to judge the morality of the situation.

He's too naive.

The age difference is less problematic.

When Eris and I first did it, we're roughly his age.

Even if in truth, I was already forty (past life included) back then... But putting that aside for now.

Ars had barely spoke up in this family meeting.

He left Aisha to clean up the mess.

And perhaps even let Aisha take the whole responsibility.

Maybe Aisha intent to do so to begin with.

But Ars certainly hadn't contributed.

Going with the flow, allowing Aisha to play the bad guy to avoid persecution.

Even under Aisha's guidance, that's totally unreasonable.

Nor should I condemn both equally.

Ultimately, Aisha is the older one, she should have shown better judgement, or Ars lacks it. That is another way to look at it.

But this is about them.

He shouldn't be playing bystander in this meeting.

Rather than agreed to let Aisha handle everything, he could have rebut me, and raised his own opinion.

Even if it made him uncomfortable, he should have carefully thought about it.

But he did nothing, that I cannot accept.

"..."

I look towards Ars.

Timid.

After the beating from Eris, he completely shriveled up.

The will to overcome his present predicament, I do not see it at all in him.

Looking at this sorry state, I'm afraid Aisha would spent rest of her life cleaning after Ars' messes.

I could say, "It can't be helped, if the feelings are mutual, but I cannot consent to your marriage until Ars becomes fully independent."

But can I promise that Ars will eventually grow up?

Aisha said this mess only occurred because she did not properly restrain Ars.
It could be just as true that Aisha couldn't control herself.

The two of them have always been together, ever since Ars was born.
Guidance for Ars has been left entirely to her.
I always thought Aisha could do no wrong.
But even Aisha can't teach what she doesn't know.
She has to learn her own lessons first.
Knowing Aisha, she would quickly learn from experience.

But Ars might not.
What could he do?
Right. Then I cannot allow for this.
Aisha and Ars need some time apart.

...

... No.

That's not it.
Even if that may be one reason, that certainly wasn't the most important.
Even I don't understand why I felt so repulsed and disgusted.

"... It might be a bit early, but Ars should attend Asura Royal Academy immediately, and stay there."

At my daze's end, I blurted out those words.
Almost the exact conclusion Paul reached for Sylphy and myself.

"Ugh! You meant to take Ars away from me?"

Aisha eyes bugged out, staring at me in disbelief.

"That's right. Ars still can't stand on his own two legs, relying on you so much. It'll benefit both of you to split up for a while."

"Wait, hold on Onii-chan. It's true what we did today is wrong. I'll be more careful in the future, especially when impeding on Ars' personal growth. Ars as well, I'm sure he understands after the beating from Eris. So--"

"No."

"Why not? Hey, Onii-chan, give me a reason! Give me a reason I can accept!"

"... I hate it."

"That's why I asked, what do you hate about it? Is it because you want Ars to marry a Asura royalty instead?"

"That's not it."

Hey, where did that come from?

Ariel had tossed that idea around before, but I never formally agreed to anything.

"So you're just treating me as property? Even though you never treat me as your property before?"

"No. I never treated you as mine."

"Then why? I can't accept it if you just say no! Give me a reason for giving in? Allow me to give up, please?"

"I don't know! But no is no!"

After what I said, Aisha clenched her teeth.

Staring at me with an unusual anger.

I don't remember her ever so angry with me before.

It's more pain than fear that I felt.

I'm also deeply troubled by my inability to put those feelings to words. But I can't help it.

I don't know why I feel so repulsed.

Even after saying what I said, this gloomy feeling in my chest did not dissipate.

Is it not enough that I find the situation unacceptable?

Do I really need to give it a reason?

Could I even apply a reason to this repulsion I felt?

"..."

Aisha sighed heavily, and for some time stared at me intensely.
After her breaths settled down, she looked suddenly relaxed.
Has she calm down? Suddenly she said.

"You're right. Ars skipped school today, because recently that's all he thinks about. Nothing good would come from staying with me."

Hearing that, I could breath a little easier.

"I'm glad you understand."

"I understand, Onii-chan."

The family meeting can finally come to an end for the day.

Part 4

Afterwards we called the kids down for dinner, then scattered.

After dinner in the living room, Sylphy, Roxy, Eris and I discussed the situation.

Sylphy seem to have suspected something starting from a few years ago.

Since she often did housework with Aisha, and she noticed something going on between Ars and Aisha.

So did Eris.

She didn't really know what's going on between them. Just that she noticed Ars acting up recently, so she suspected that he found a love interest.

She never expected that she was Aisha.

Roxy never noticed.

She regrets it deeply, and volunteers to go with Ars to Asura Royal Academy.

As a guest instructor, she might able to extend a hand when Ars gets in trouble.

Maybe Ars won't become so dependent if it was Roxy.

I also thought about what's next for them.

After Ars drops out of Magic University, he'll attend Asura Royal Academy.

He will learn to live without Aisha's protection.

Using his own judgement to think, act, and face the consequences.

Maybe with this experience he can escape that dependency.

When he returns, he'll be an adult.

If then he still likes Aisha.

And even in consideration of their future together.

And convinced what happened was not spur of the moment.

Then maybe I might give them my blessing.

Honestly, my disgust has not yet dissipated. Even now I feel a strong urge to hurl.

But this wasn't something for me to decide alone.

Even though they're both family, and I'm also Ars' guardian.

But neither are them my property.

Aisha has long reached the age of maturity, and Ars once reached adulthood would leave my guardianship.

Of course, in consideration of Hitogami's presence, I would like to keep some control over their lives.

But ultimately I shouldn't try to move them like chess pieces.

"Em, I understand. This sounds like what Rudeus would do."

"... If Rudeus made up his mind, that'll be what we do."

"Yes, I understand."

After discussing it with them, all three accepted the decision.

At least from my perspective, they don't seem to feel the same repulsion about the situation.

Since in this world, marriage between close-relatives are a regular occurrence.

Especially among the aristocracy in Asura Kingdom.

Even some Demon Race share this custom.

So there's not much resistance.

Perhaps I'm the odd one out here.

Even if I have become used to the world, ultimately I'm from another world.

My nature isn't something that can be easily changed.

Not to say, I myself had once committed such forbidden act with a relative...

"Those two remind me of how we were once."

"Do they...?"

I shook my head in response to Sylphy.

Aisha and Ars, versus Sylphy and myself, our situations are quite different.

No, that's not what she refers to.

But rather, how we're forced into separation by family.

If that day, Paul did not force us apart, how different would my life been?

Meeting Eris, leaving Sylphy from so long.

If the Metastasis Event never happened, maybe I would never reunite with Sylphy, and married Eris alone.

Perhaps Ars will have an encounter with someone at Asura Royal Academy, like I had with Eris?

At least something like the Metastasis Event probably won't happen again.

Ah, if they give it a little time, maybe things would cool down a bit.

What happens next might turn out for the better or worse.

To me, even if there's some momentary confusion, I believe it'll turn out for the better.

"But to act so one-sided, Rudeus, that's rather out of character for you."

"... Yeah."

"If you have a reason to, they at least deserve an explanation. Getting separated, without just cause, is rather distressing."

Speaking was Sylphy, whose words are heavy with responsibility.

Perhaps she had in an earlier time acknowledged their relationship.

Having readied herself, she didn't share my resistance.

"I know."

She's right.

I was too stubborn.

Even though separating me from Sylphy was ultimately for the best...

Forcing the same upon them, ultimately there's a difference.

Whether it be Aisha, or Ars, they're both living beings.

No matter how willingly they accept my decisions, I have no rights to be so arbitrary.

"..."

What is the right choice here?

What is the best course of action?

With those thoughts still, the discussion ended, and we each headed to our respective beds.

Part 5

Next Day.

Aisha and Ars disappeared, leaving behind only a single note.

"We will live our own lives."

They eloped.

Chapter 25

The Search

Part 1

Aisha and Ars disappeared.

The household fell into a state of panic.

As soon I read their note, I sprinted out the house.

I have no clue where they might hide, but I got to look for them.

I begin with places they (particularly Aisha) would frequent in the city.

But they couldn't be found.

Not even after a full day of search.

Rude Mercenary Company.

Cliff's house.

Magic University.

Mercenary Corp's various warehouses around the city.

Aisha's favorite cafe, clothing and fabric stores, grocers, and wholesalers.

I even went by Orsted's office to look.

No sight of them anywhere.

Looks like they're no longer in the city.

It wasn't like there were no eyewitnesses.

Early in the morning, they walked past the city gates.

Early in the morning, they left in a horse carriage.

Early in the morning, they borrowed horses from the stable and left.

And other intel like these.

But every intel conflicts with another.

So I don't even know whether they're still inside the city or out.

I'm afraid this has all been part of Aisha's misinformation campaign.

But Aisha could not have spread all these misinformation alone.

Who could have helped?

Who could Aisha command at will?

The answer is obvious.

The Mercenary Corp.

As soon as I reached the conclusion, I headed back to Rude Mercenary Company HQ.
Rinia and Pursena need to be properly interrogated.

"Rude Mercenary Company, Rule Number One!"

"Proper greeting etiquette! Bow hard, head low!"

"Rude Mercenary Company, Rule Number Two!"

"Back straight, yell loud!"

"Rude Mercenary Company, Rule Number Three!"

"Never forget, treat patrons with courtesy!"

On my return, Rinia and Pursena are side by side, standing imposingly, giving instruction to the corp members on the company creeds.

"Never forget ~nya."

"Internalize them nano!"

They alternated the instructions as a tag team.

Like some kind of underground society.

I guess Aisha taught them this.

"Rinia, Pursena, come here for a bit."

"Nyaa? The boss is back. Speaking of which, the financial advisor hasn't ~nya."

"I was just going to ask about that."

"Alright, you're all dismissed. Work hard today!"

After the company members scatter, I followed them to the office.

A nice, steady set of table and chairs, seem awfully expensive.

A statue of an unknown creature.

It looked like a fierce monster.

A magic tool I gave them to keep meat fresh, a fridge.

A room decorated with Rinia, Pursena, and Aisha's favorite things.

Aisha likes cute stuff.

Even though she lacks the talent to make them, she has a good eye for them.

Don't know why would I suddenly recall something like that, but as soon as they sat down I begin the interrogation.

"So you two haven't heard nothing?"

"W-we don't know nothing ~nya?"

"That's right. We got nothing, not even any meat nano."

Rinia whistled crudely, and Pursena's voice dropped at the first mention of meat.

Looks like they do have some idea.

"Sounds like you actually know something. Now fess up."

I said with the grimmest face I can muster.

Instantly terrified, hugging each other, they nod heavily.

"We don't know exactly where they went ~nya!"

"Really don't nano!"

"Just that first thing in the morning, she told us to spread rumours around ~nya!"

"We are not lying, please believe us! Even though we don't have any proof nano..."

No proof, huh?

In other words, no way to figure out which intel is true, and which is false.
At least, not without Aisha's skills in shifting through intel...

At least I finally found a clue.

Aisha was here.

Ultimately, only the Mercenary Corp would answer to her every beck and call.

Instructed them to spread rumours first thing in the morning, then took one of the routes mentioned, or perhaps a different one altogether.

Sounds like one of Aisha's clever schemes.

It won't end just here.

Even if I follow the correct trail, more and more traps would certainly awaits me.

"I believe you. But in return, you two will help me search for Aisha."

Is it a good idea to rely on the Mercenary Corp?

Perhaps they'll just fake the search.

Or Corp itself would leak intel to Aisha.

That possibility certainly exists.

Relying on others and have it backfire, that kind of things happens all the time.

But right now I can leave no stone unturned.

Despite my thoughts, Rinia and Pursena looked rather troubled.

"Well, can I persuade you to give up ~nya? The advisor warned us before to think very carefully about whose side we're on, when push comes to shove."

"If that gets exposed, it'll ruin our reputation! No one will ever respect us again nano."

Looks like Aisha had something on them.

"It's hard to find anyone in the Corp willing to make an enemy out of Aisha ~nya."

"She got something on everyone nano."

So it's not just them.

And all the mercenaries working here owe Aisha favors too.

In other words, Aisha had the entire Corp under wraps.

"... I'm not trying to hurt Aisha. I just want to talk..."

"Even so..."

"And I don't know what we'll be talking about. Don't you think it'll be terribly lonely if we never get to meet again?"

My words might not be particularly convincing, but my heart wrenches at the thought that we'll never see Ars and Aisha again.

At least exchange a few words.

That's my true feeling.

But right now if we cross paths, it'll just be a repeat of yesterday...

"I'm counting on you."

Rinia turned toward Pursena as she listen.

Pursena looked troubled still, but she finally nod, her ears drooped.

Rinia said after clearing her throat,

"I understand ~nya. If the advisor really intent on running away, I think there's not much we can do to help, but at least we can give you a hand."

"Are you sure?"

"When I became a slave, I also thought I would never get to see my family again ~nya. I understand how you feel."

Now that she mentioned it, that did happened.

Hadn't her debt been repaid?

I don't really know, since I left Aisha to take care of it.

If there's any debt remaining, maybe I can get to her repaid in merit.

"I owe you one."

With that said, I made my leave.

Part 2

The Mercenary Corp may be mine, but for searching Aisha it's not the ideal.
In times like this, I need to borrow the power of other organizations.

First are the Magic University and the Magic Guild.

They're the primary power brokers of magic city Sharia.

If Aisha's trying to misdirect me away from the city, they can be of help.

As long as I put up a bulletin on the school boards, I might get intel from the student body.

"Right, I should go check in with Zanoba."

Zanoba Company.

Originally set up as small store front for the sole purpose of selling the Ruijerd picture books.

But due to the solid foundations build by Zanoba and Julie in the early days, its operations have expanded massively in recent years.

Not only did it have major factories in Asura Kingdom, its branch stores have spread all over the world.

Even though Zanoba Company frequently employ Rude Mercenary Company for protection, Aisha doesn't frequent here.

But I do.

So I suspect the chance of Aisha showing up here is low...

Anyways, I should check in with Zanoba, Julie, and Ginger.

Inform the three of them (and one doll) what happened.

Even though I rather not discuss in public a family scandal.

I think at least Zanoba should know.

"That was rather out of character for you, Shishou, to not make your reasons clear."

After hearing my story, Zanoba said.

"It's not like I don't want to explain myself, just that Ars' too young still..."

"Kids grow up fast. It's only a matter of years, a fact who matured early like Shishou is no doubt aware."

"... Yeah."

When Zanoba and I first met, we were not much older than Ars.

Well, there's a difference, if I count my previous life too...

"Perhaps it was because Shishou knew this, that Shishou use age to refute them."

Everyone grows up.

Maybe just not right away.

So long as they reflect on their actions, then work hard to better themselves, they'll grow.

With effort, just like I had.

Even useless trash like me ended up being somewhat respectable.

So I do believe noone is beyond help, personal growth is possible for everyone.

"So what should I have said?"

"Well... first off, you might been too stubborn. If Shishou forcefully separate them without discretion, they have little option but to elope."

"But I thought that if this was to continue, Ars would always stay utterly dependent on Aisha."

"What's so bad about that? Even in those conditions, he can still mature. It might just take a bit more time."

"..."

Indeed, no matter how dependent, no matter how slowly, he would eventually grow up.

Maybe lacking in certain areas.

But even then it's fine, as long as there're those around him willing to come to his aid.

... I certainly am well aware.

So why was I so strongly against it?

"Julie, what do you think?"

Anyways, let's get a female's point-of-view.

She looks downcast and pale.

"What's wrong, Julie?"

"No... well.."

"Julie, do you know something? Don't tell me, you're hiding something from Zanoba-sama?"

Seeing that Julie refused to talk, Ginger who had remained silent until now spoke.

"I saw it."

"Saw what?"

"This morning, I saw Aisha and Ars heading to the basement."

"What!?"

That made me jumped.

A new clue!

There're Teleportation Circles set up in the Zanoba Company basement.

They connect to our secret laboratory in Asura Kingdom Fittoa Region.

"Julie, why didn't you say something earlier?"

"Because Zanoba-sama and Rudeus-sama had been sneaking in and out the basement too..."

"Eh..."

Zanoba looks away.

Maybe he thought we missed our chance to catch Aisha, because of what we have been working on in secret.

But it's just like Aisha, to find a weakness to exploit.

Alternatively, if we hadn't been sneaking about, she won't have took this escape route.

"You didn't notice, Zanoba?"

"I stayed overnight at the store yesterday."

"Oh..."

Likely that Aisha knew of Zanoba's travel plans.

Since there're probably Corp members undercover among Zanoba Company's bodyguards.

"So they did head to Asura Kingdom."

"In that case... we're going to need Ariel's help to find Aisha and Ars."

"Yeah, I'll do that."

First I should visit with Ariel.

"Shishou."

Zanoba stops me as I was about to leave.

"Whether be with your siblings or kids, when you're at odds, make sure you sit down and talk it out. With the younger generation, you have to listen and consider their views. Even if you're right."

"..."

"You might think I'm speaking out of turn as a third party..."

"No, thank you."

It's rare for Zanoba to lecture me.

Maybe he spoke out of regret for his brother Pax. I can appreciate the weight behind his words.

He's right though.

This time around, I never tried to hear what Ars has to say.

Because he never spoke up, I just spoke to Aisha and ignored him.

Never gave him a chance to explain what he wants to do.

Never considered his opinions.

Back then, if I have handled it better, maybe they won't have eloped.

If I could find them, I got to listen to what Ars has to say.
I'll do that.

Part 3

Aisha and Ars are presumed in hiding in Asura Kingdom, the largest country in the world. Of course, it's also the most populated.

Like hiding forest amongst the trees, No one keep track of when new faces show up. More importantly, because it's a wealthy nation, eaking out a living won't be a problem.

Of course, Asura Kingdom is also a military society.

There're soldiers stationed everywhere.

If given portraits of Ars and Aisha, they should able to find them.

I'll try to get cooperation of the knighthood and army.

I hurriedly rushed toward Ariel's residence.

By the time I arrived, it was already evening.

When I said it was an emergency, I was led directly to Ariel's sleeping quarters.

"That's it..."

Ariel was already in her pajamas, her hair a mess.

She must been asleep already.

All tense when I first arrived, as soon as I finished she could only wearily complaint.

"What you mean, 'that's it'?"

"It's just trouble at home."

"Ah... Right..."

"I was wondering what it could be, when I heard you had an emergency."

Ariel is a busy monarch.

Recently, it became impossible to meet her without prior scheduling.

But I got audience as soon I asked.

Being told an emergency, she must have assumed it was Hitogami-related or Teleportation Circle-related.

So agreed to meet me.

In other words, she only allowed my audience because of the trust vested in me.

But my issue is merely family troubles.

A little inappropriate.

"You're right. My apologies."

"... No need for apologies. An advisor for Rude Mercenary Company disappeared. A capable one. Her going missing will have adverse impact on our future plans."

"It meant a lot for you to say that."

"Anyways, I'll have Sylvester assist with the search. But if she really doesn't want to be found, I'm afraid that won't be much help..."

Rapidly Ariel wrote a note and send it off with a servant.

Sylvester is in charge of security, one of the Seven Knights of Asura.

I have seen him quite often recently, but only exchanged pleasantries. We never really had a chance to talk, so I don't really know much about him.

"I really appreciate it."

In that case, I can just leave the Asura side to them.

I need to figure out what I should do next.

As I was about to make my leave, Ariel spoke out.

"I guess it runs in the family."

"The family?"

"Running away due to family rules, haven't your father done the same?"

Ah, Paul.

Now that she mentions it, Paul became a runaway after a disagreement with his father.

He never returned.

I don't think they ever reconciled either.

Am I following their footsteps?

Aisha, and Ars too, are we never going to see each other again?

"..."

"Be honest with me, why are you so against it?"

"Even if you ask..."

"Just let them get married. Consider it a reward for Aisha, of all her royal years of service."

You hear these kind of story in Asura all the time.

The master rewards a capable servant the hand of his daughter.

Of course, with their mutual consent.

Ariel once said, when the kids grow up, let one marry one of her daughters.

It's not unreasonable.

Truth is, there are many unhappy with me, for taking advantage as my role as Ariel's confidant and acting freely within Asura Kingdom.

Stuck around for all the advantages, just because I was once of assistance to Ariel.

I'm only installing Teleportation Circles within Asura for the associated privileges, some said.

Basically, I'm just a clinger-on who has long stayed beyond Ariel's welcome.

That's why, if one of my children, particularly a son, end up marrying into the royal family, it'll demonstrate to the public the depth of our friendship.

That was Ariel's desire.

"Because it's Aisha and Ars! That can't be right?"

"One is the aunt, and the other the troublesome nephew she helped raised... What's wrong with that relationship? Just because Ars is the firstborn son? You're not nobility. He doesn't have to continue the family legacy, didn't you said that before?"

"It's not that.. Just that, marrying so close within the family is not good?"

"What's wrong with that?"

"..."

What is wrong with that?

Why do I find it so repulsive?

That might be forbidden in the previous world, but this world lacks such prohibition.

For those families that find import in bloodlines, marriage between nephews and aunts are not uncommon.

So why I reject it so?

Is it jealousy?

That I do in fact love Aisha, and had long considered her mine?

No, impossible.

If that's really the case, why would I refuse to make a move on her?

No, it's something else all together.

Maybe it was as Aisha had said, that I consider her property?

Even if I adamantly refuse, in my heart I already thought so, but instead projected that anger on Ars?

Not impossible... but that doesn't feel right.

Because it impedes Ars' growth?

That's true, but that's a secondary issue at best.

What made me so resistant is another all together.

"I don't know."

"Then you should spend some time thinking it through. I'm sure Aisha would really want to hear it."

"Yes."

Just like Ariel said.

Before I talk with Aisha again, I need to get my thoughts in order.

Or it would happen all over again.

Before I get to convey my thoughts and feelings, Aisha will escape again.

"Then I'll take my leave. I'm sorry for intruding you in your sleeping quarters."

"It's fine."

On my way out, I greeted Doga, who's standing guard by the door.
Full of concern he said, "I'll help you find your sister."

Much appreciated.

Part 4

After returning from Ariel's, I headed to Orsted's Office.

It was already late into night.

Way too late for house calls.

But there're more people I require assistance from.

Even though I wanted to continue my work tomorrow, for now I need to request leave.

"Ah, Rudeus-sama, found Aisha and Ars yet?"

"Not yet. Is Orsted-sama in?"

"At his office."

I greet Alek, nod at the secretary Felia, and head toward the office.

Before I enter Orsted's office, I hesitated a bit.

Is it appropriate for me to request an extended leave?

Orsted never put any guidelines for me on requesting leaves.

Normally, as long as I asked, he'll give me as many days of rest as I like.

On the other hand, leaving work unattended for days due to family matters is certainly inappropriate.

No, this is important to me.

Just do it.

"Rudeus."

Orsted peers over from across the room.

Just a glance, but it felt like he observed me intensely.

Looks like he already knew what I'm here for.

It made me nervous and sweaty.

"I have something to ask."

"About Ars and Aisha?"

"... So you heard?"

"Roxy mentioned it."

Roxy?

She's also on the moves.

Well, even though I went out on my own, Sylphy and Eris must have been busy too.

I need to thank them when I get home.

"Aisha seems to have ran away."

"Right, and Ars too. I'm looking for them."

"If Aisha's serious, she'll be hard to find."

"... So said everyone, but I have to look for them. May I take some time off?"

I said, resisting Orsted's terrifying sight.

Like always, killing intent emanated from Orsted eyes.

"I'll speak to Perugius about this."

"Huh?"

Why Perugius?

For what purpose?

"He spend time monitoring the ground. Maybe he can find them."

"Oh... Of course! I'm counting on you!"

Looks like Orsted will lend a hand too.

"You refuse to listen and deny them, there must be reason?"

"... I couldn't explain it either."

Orsted seemed surprised to hear that.

Well, now I really got to think this though.

Part 5

After that, I requested assistance from my acquaintances around the world.

Milis, the Great Forest, Kingdom of the Dragon King, Magic Continent, Basherant Dukedom.

I explained the situation to every organization that I have allied.

Cliff lectured me too. While a troubling situation, with three wives already, you really shouldn't be the one to balk. Be more considerate.

Elinalise was shocked that I didn't just approve of them.

Norn was surprised by Aisha's actions. She was angry and said I acted appropriately.

Ruijerd stayed silent after hearing what happened. Only in the end did he said, "I'll help with the search."

Even though they all have various opinions, they all agreed to help with the search.

For the Demon Continent, I'll have to depend on the Atofe Imperial Guards.

But Atofe is missing and Moore has not yet returned.

An headless mob... That's going a bit too far, particularly since it was me that picked a fight with Atofe in the first place, but without direction from above, I can't expect them to act in force.

I wanted to find the missing-person-tracing-machine Kishirika... but she's missing.

I feel like she can track them down instantly if I find her, but that plan failed.

Afterwards, I got everyone I knew in the hunt.

Even Leo is helping, and Ruijerd has left home to join the search.

Perugius was less than enthused, but agreed to search from above.

Orsted and Alek agreed to help in their spare time.

But we came up empty.

Even with the world's most talented trackers and headhunters, no one found a clue.

It's like Aisha and Ars have disappeared from this world, not a trace remained.

Part 6

It's been a month since then.

Lilia turned bedridden from shock.

Lying in her bed, all she could say was, "I'm so sorry, if I taught her better this wouldn't had happen."

She probably convinced herself that she carried responsibility that Aisha and Ars would elope.

Even though her health has improved, she remained despondent, troubled.

Once I overheard her weeping in her room, but when I check in on her, Zenith was patting her head.

Zenith slapped me once.

When I had Lara translate for me, she said, "She's just sad."

Seems like she approves of Ars and Aisha getting married.

Even though I was sure she would be against it...

Perhaps in Zenith's mind, the vision she saw was quite wonderful.

Or perhaps she's just happy for them.

Sylphy has been depressed, "if only I left them with another option..." She also picked up Aisha and Lilia's share of housework.

She couldn't help with the search, but she took over all the housework like laundry, breakfast, etc.

It's all thank to her that we managed some semblance of normalcy in a family crisis like this.

Eris hadn't said much.

She just pouts as she clenches the wooden sword that Ars has left behind.

As if with her mind made up, she started practicing her sword swing.

Roxy said "I'll go look for them" and began packing. I had to rush to stop her.

I felt like if Roxy disappears too at this moment, this family would just completely fall apart.

Even so, she is still helping with the search via her own connections.

The kids are all nervous.

Lara looks unfazed, but even her mischiefs have lessened in recent days.

Sieg hasn't talked much, even though he's usually quite the talker, but he doesn't speak up at home anymore.

Lily used to prefer indoors, but now occasionally she would go to the gate, climb up Beat, and look out the main road.

Chris would say, "What happened to Ars-nii and Aisha-nee? I want to see them again..." and start crying.

Lucy is worried about them.

She already graduated from Magic University, and is currently attending Asura Royal Academy.

She's boarding there.

Even though she's plenty busy with her own stuff, she made sure to reach out to her old Magic University classmates for help.

As time pass, I returned to work.

Not that I gave up on the search.

Aisha and Ars are both very important to us.

But there're stuff that I can't left unattended.

As time spent searching decline, time spent thinking increased.

When eating, while bathing, before sleep, after waking up.

I was always thinking.

Why did I reject them with no explanation?

No matter what, it wasn't right for me to disregard their opinions.

Disregard their opinions, refused to explain myself. That was certainly wrong.

I shouldn't have done that, I should have knew better.

But the answer never came. A month pass, then another.
Aisha and Ars are nowhere to be found.

Part 7

Half a year after they disappeared.

I met up with Nanahoshi.

It was the first time we met after they disappeared.

So that was what we talked about.

When I brought up Aisha and Ars, she just listened in silence.

She didn't raise any concerned, simply listened.

That day, we also talked about other stuff.

Of the past life.

The topic meandered aimlessly.

About the takoyaki shop near Nanahoshi's home.

A takoyaki shop that was always there, one that I visited many times since I was young.

How we could really use some takoyaki and rice right now.

Stuff like that.

Suddenly, while reminiscing, I remembered.

Something that happened over thirty years ago.

Something I should have never forgot.

It was before I was born... before my life in this world has begun.

Or perhaps, the start of it all.

It was my previous life.

The day I passed away.

I had brothers and sisters.

Brother was married already.

And had kids.

Two of them.

Both girls.

They look different from Norn and Aisha, they're Japanese after all, but their shared in their innocence.

Brother's house and my house (that is, our parents) are close by, so they'll stay over often. Along with his wife and kids.

I took advantage of that.

Setup a hidden camera in the bath for my niece.

In other words, I took voyeur shots.

Not that I'm particularly interested in my niece.

Just that it was convenient, that was the only reason I did it.

Then that day arrived.

The day my parents passed away.

That day I also setup my camera.

And brother found out.

That day, I felt brother was still willing to have a talk with me.

At least, I thought so.

If it were my sisters or younger brother, they would certainly beat me up right away.

But brother was different.

He might be ready to give up, but he was still willing to give me one last chance.

Our parents are gone, I can't protect you anymore.

It's finally time for you to step out on your own.

If there's something I can help with, just ask.

In that moment, I probably would feel a little motivated myself, to give life another shot.

Because the fact is, he'll help however he can.

Brother was that kind of man.

Since after so long, he never gave up on me.

Until he saw that photo.

Then my brother snapped.

Now that I thought about it, that was the first time anyone ever beat me.

Not the sister that long gave up on me, nor the younger brother who threatened me with a stick.

Seeing that photo, he paused for five seconds, then shouting nonsense as he beated me.

Only natural.

The me now could understand.

I would have done the same.

In that situation, if I was in my brother's shoes, I would have beat Aisha without question.

In other words, that was what happened.

The me that day, was my brother back then.

But not only Aisha was a girl, compared to me in my past life she was ever more diligently working, living, and responsible.

So I didn't beat her.

But I couldn't help but feel so repulsed by what happened between Aisha and Ars, so I forcibly split them apart.

I was emotional.

Because of guilt toward brother, I impulsively acted that way.

Because my instinct convinced myself the same mistakes are being repeated.

That must be why I rejected them.

But Aisha's circumstance is different.

Superficially similar, but completely different.

The feelings between Aisha and Ars are mutual.

I was just taking voyeur shots.

Given time, they would definitely form a healthy relationship.

Even though Ars is indeed a little young, and he was probably acting on instincts.

But it had been ten years.

For over a decade, Aisha was with Ars.

Ten years are a long, long time.

Impeding Ars' personal growth was a mere excuse.
It was purely my own overreaction.
So I acted just like brother.

That day, brother cut me off.
After I died, our relationship were forever severed.

But even if I had lived and wished to apologize, what could be done?
Even if our relationship was over, I could have at least apologize.
He won't forgive me, and we'll never be the same.
But there must be something I could have done.

Even though I don't know what...

All in all, at least I now know the source of my repulsion.
That day carved in my heart a scar that never healed.
So I always forbade myself from making another move on family.
Even if my scar and repulsion can't compare to brother's.

If I met Aisha again, I need to apologize.
Apologize for wanting to force them apart without reason.
If I don't, there's no room for discussion.
Nothing would change.
In that family meeting, Aisha had already apologized to me.
Then she asked me for a reason she could accept.
So now it's my turn.
Apologize, and explain to her what happened in my past life.

After that, I need to discuss with them about their future.
Next time, I got to communicate better.
Even I don't know how it'll turn out, but I don't want to force them to agree again.

That was what I decided on.

Part 8

The search for them continues, since the day Aisha left that note, for over a year.

Chapter 26

Ars

Part 1

To Ars Rudeus, Aisha is an special existence.

She has been by his side ever since he could remember, no matter where and when always watching over him.

Her existence is akin to a fourth mother.

His three mothers each taught Ars various things.

Sylphy taught knowledge and how to make friends.

Roxy taught wisdom and tricks for studying.

Eris taught sword skills and to protect those important to him.

Aisha also taught him many things.

But more than the mothers, she helped him understood things he couldn't otherwise.

So she's unlike the mothers.

So, perhaps her existence is more akin to an older sister?

Ars has two older sisters.

Lucy is the respectable sister.

Diligently follow the mothers' teachings, attend class, always acting high and mighty, and lecturing Ars on studying and exercise.

Lara is the lazy sister.

Ignoring mothers' lectures, skipping classes, but always treating Ars as an equal and a friend, or involving him with her various mischiefs. Quite a few times, Ars got in trouble after following her advices.

Aisha also, sometimes lecturing him, other times offering suggestions.
But more than the sisters, her lectures and advices helped him better understood himself.
Different from the self-improvement or fun provided by his older sisters.

So compared to Lucy and Lara, she's also different.
Not a mother nor an sister, an existence he couldn't quite grasp.
That is Aisha.

Anything he asked for, Aisha would always comply.
No matter how capricious the request, she would always say, what am I to do with you, but
always made it happen.
Sometimes she would be strict with him, but never did she lecture Ars without cause.
Whenever Ars was upset, she would always gently hug him.
And suggested how he can do better next time.
No matter how upset Ars gotten, as long as his face was buried in Aisha's ample bosoms,
all his worries would simply fade away.

When he was still small, there was a time when he thought her annoying.
But Aisha was always right.
When feeling rebellious, and he done opposite of what Aisha said, it always ended in
disaster.
But at the end, Aisha would arrive and say, "See, get it now?"
Ars could only grumble and nod.

When Ars turned ten, he thought he'll always be protected by Aisha, living under her
guidance.
Maybe he was brainwashed.
Aisha's guidance robbed Ars of his critical thinking, since "everything will turn out alright,
as long as he listen to Aisha" had long been planted in him.
But to Ars back then, he never thought that was a terrible thing.

When Ars had his tenth, family members each gave him a present.
Among them was a sword.
A real sword.

Eris the red mama told Ars, "use this to protect those important to you."

In that moment, only Aisha's face appeared in his mind.

And instinctively he turned towards Aisha.

As if she felt him, she looked back as well and their sights crossed. She smiled.

Don't know why, but he felt embarrassed, and turned away.

Perhaps it was at that moment Ars realized his feelings for Aisha.

Of course, he didn't speak it.

Because he was too embarrassed.

Or perhaps it was because Lara the older sister was still childish, or Clive of the same age had yet to act on his feelings towards Lucy.

He was too young for romance.

Perhaps that was what he thought.

Then one day, something happened that made him think otherwise.

It happened in the bath.

Greyray House has a special rule of always using the bath in pairs.

Usually Ars would take his bath with Aisha.

But quite a few times that month, they didn't.

Instead, it was with one of his three moms, or with one of his siblings.

But that day, it was a rare occasion to bath with his father.

Father was a distant existence to Ars.

Not only was he rarely home, he was also one that command respect from everybody.

Not just the mothers, but all the adults as well.

Like Dragon God Orsted, North God Alek the Third, also the school principal and vice-principal.

All the incredible people in Ars' eyes were full of praise for Rudeus.

And also, no matter whatever Ars did wrong, his father never yelled at him.

Only smiled and said, "be more careful next time."

Once, while loitering in father's study, he accidentally tipped over a particular figurine, smashing it.

It was an important figure that father's friend Zanoba gave him.

Of course, Ars thought he would get lectured.

And in truth, white mama admonished him, red mama spanked him, and blue mama lectured him sternly.

So of course father would have yelled as well.

With that thought, he apologized to father.

But father wasn't upset.

"You're very honest. That's impressive. Next time, please be more careful." With that said, he patted Ars on the head.

What a relief!

Lucy believed father's attitude meant he had "no expectations for us."

So close, yet so distant, father had already casted us aside, having zero expectations for useless children, she said.

When he heard that, Ars thought, why, of course. His heart sank.

Even though Lucy used winning father's approval as motivation for working hard, Ars couldn't do the same.

But even a father like him felt relaxed in the bath.

With head leaning against the edge of the bath, lying flat with his limbs spread, he said "Oh~, I'm healed."

Rare seeing father like this.

Of course, at home he's often laxed. But in Ars' eyes, he remained so capable.

Ars studied his father's behavior carefully that day.

Sensing the attention, perhaps feeling a little awkward, he sat back up and met Ars in the eyes, whom was sitting across the bath.

"Em, Ars, can you wash your hair on your own yet?"

"... Yes, sir. And rest of me too. Isn't that expected?"

In front of father, he couldn't help but speak politely.

"Ah, of course. You're ten already. You sure grew up fast."

Father said with a laugh.

"Sword skills is intermediate, but should reach advanced soon. Still beginner in magic, but I'm capable in chantless magic."

"I see. Exercise and studies are important, but don't overdo it. It'll all be pointless if you wreck your body in the process."

Hearing him, Ars couldn't help but think.

Father really held no expectations for us.

When father was his age, he already was Saint Level in Water Magic, and intermediate in Swords.

We're lagging way behind in comparison.

Zero expectations.

That thought made Ars depressed.

"So, em. You're ten now."

"Yeah, I am?"

"It's that pestering Ariel. Few days ago, I was visiting Asura Kingdom, and Ariel-sama mentioned a marriage proposal of her daughter and you."

"Marriage...?"

"Yeah. For nobles of Asura Kingdom, around ten is usually when that topic crops up."

Father stared straight at Ars, murmuring "Em" and nodded.

"Those conversations will definitely happen more frequently now."

"Eh, really?"

"It's a good thing you took after Eris. You'll definitely have many suitors."

When he heard that, he thought reflectively.

How annoying.

"But Ars, I must warn you. Don't fool around with girls just because you're popular. If in the process, you made them cry, papa will get mad at you."

"... Yes."

He can't imagine father angry.

But at that point Ars realized.

The idea of Marriage was never that far away from him.

So whom he would rather have that kind of relationship with...

In that moment, as naturally as it may, Aisha's face floated in his mind.

Less than a year later, he confessed to Aisha.

Of course, during that moment, he didn't understand.

Always under Aisha's protection, Ars couldn't understand.

The Ars who thought "everything will turn out alright, as long as he listen to Aisha" wouldn't understand what Eris meant by "protect those important to him."

What he didn't understand was, it was he who was suppose to be protecting Aisha.

Part 2

He must protect Aisha.

The first time that dawned on him was the family meeting, when Eris got angry.

Until then, to Ars, Aisha was a perfect existence.

Capable of accomplishing everything to perfection.

Failures were rare, but even then she could manage a complete recovery.

An existence that didn't need his help, didn't need his protection.

That was the Aisha in his heart.

But in that family meeting, Aisha fell into a predicament.

Yet he didn't understand.

And he still didn't, not until Eris pummeled him and yelled, "Even though I taught you to protect" before it finally dawned on him.

How cornered was Aisha.

Only then he realized.

Aisha was human.

Even though she's wise beyond words, but she's not perfect, and sometimes she makes mistakes.

No matter how few and far between.

Certainly far less than Ars.

But she still makes mistakes.

Then he understood what it meant to protect Aisha.

When Aisha gets cornered, stand before her, and give his all to keep danger at bay.

Let his body be her shield, even exchange his life for hers if necessary.

That's what it meant to protect Aisha.

Just like Aisha has always done for Ars.

Ars finally understood.

Until now, he was always the one being protect.

Thus he decided.

From then on, he'll always protect Aisha.

It was that moment when he woke up from his brainwashing.

Yet Ars was but a child.

Lacking in both wisdom and experience.

If only Ars was smarter, or a few years older.

After the family meeting, when Aisha said to him, "Let's go and live our own lives, let's elope!" then he may have resisted.

Aisha-nee, allow me protect you this time around. I will definitely explain myself properly, so let's give talking with father another try.

Or perhaps, until I become an adult, please wait for me. I'll definitely marry you then. Something like that.

But Ars, at that moment, only remembered three lessons.

One was what Eris taught him,

"Protect those important to you."

And what Aisha taught him,

"If you want to do something, just do it. When in trouble, jump into the action."

And finally the ending of an old fairy tale.

"Separate those mutually in love would only end in disaster."

From these three lessons, Ars concluded:

(If it's what Aisha wants, let her. When Aisha makes a mistake and fallen on hard times, then it's my turn to help and protect her.)

As expected of Eris' child, she would have reach the same conclusion.

In any case, he nod in agreement with the idea to elope.

After that, following Aisha's instructions, he nervously absconded with her.

With Aisha following close behind, his sword was always readied.

When they encountered magical beasts or robbers on the road, he took the initiative and fought.

Without realizing it, his legs no longer tremored.

The sword skills he was trained in since birth ended up useful against magical beasts and robbers alike.

In the morning, he did the work Aisha found for him.

Even though Ars was still young, he was capable in both magic and sword play, so there're plenty of jobs to be had.

Tapping into everything he know to do the job.

Aisha purposely looked for those type of work for him.

Ars also trained his sword and magic skills during work.

Exercise, practice swings, and chantless magic during break time.

Repetition, practice, and the real deal, the most effective way for Ars to gain experience.

Perhaps Aisha thought of that too.

They also had wild nights together.

It was only natural, since they both wanted so.

Days lacking mothers and father certainly made him anxious.

But he doesn't regret it.

Rather, he felt fulfillment for doing what he wanted.

And anyways, Aisha's always smiling.

Then one day, even that last bit of anxiety dissipated.

It was half year since they eloped. On one particular day, he no longer felt anxious.

In its stead, he gained resolution.

But Aisha's smiles were replaced by anxiety and unease in turn.
When Onii-chan finds them, what he would do, it was probably that.
Ars must have come to an realization.
That he must do the protecting.

Not that he was particularly confident.
After half a year, although he gained quite a bit of confidence, he wasn't particularly strong.
Not against father, red mama, white mama, or even blue mama did he have a shot of winning.

Despite that, when father and mothers come to separate us, or try to harm Aisha, he'll fight.
He won't let them touch Aisha.
Even if it kills him, he'll protect Aisha.
Naturally it came to that.

Because that was what father had done, and what red mama taught him to do.
Those confusing lessons finally made sense to him.

Ars made up his mind. Then, the moment came.

Part 3

---Rudeus' Point of View----

Aisha and Ars were sighted in Milis Continent.

At a remote corner of Holy Kingdom of Milis, in a small village by some river.

Aisha and Ars apparently live in a cottage there.

The eyewitness account came from Roxy.

Or more specifically, from an adventurer.

An adventurer working in Milis, by request visited this village, and discovered Aisha and Ars.

Because of the request made to the adventurer's guild, for finding Aisha and Ars, that intel was turned over to Rude Mercenary Company.

When Rude Mercenary Company received the intel, it was duly suppressed as prearranged by Aisha.

But it didn't end there.

Even though I prevent Roxy from joining the search.

In secret, she nevertheless used the Teleportation Circles to collect intel from all over world.

Because of their privacy policy, Adventurer's Guild wouldn't provide intel gathered for requestors to outside parties.

But Roxy had an old acquaintance working at the Milis Adventurer's Guild.

That was how Roxy learned of their whereabouts, and the fact that the Mercenaries suppressed that intel.

Roxy hurried to the village as soon as she learned of it.

And spotted from afar Aisha and Ars.

She avoided contact and hurried back home to deliver the news (I was worried sick since Roxy had disappeared for days)...

That's what happened.

After that I reached the village.

Bringing Sylphy and Roxy with me, and Eris as well.

Lilia wanted to come, but I decided to leave her home.

Let me talk to Aisha first.

A peaceful village, lacking in every amenities.

I heard it's a village built by the forester guild.

Located at the midpoint for lumber transport route, between the lumbers upriver and the merchants in the city, an industry-based village.

Husbandry and farming are only kept for subsistence.

Since it's by a forest, damages by magic beast are frequent occurrences, so requests to the adventurer's guild are made regularly.

And because the village would naturally disappear once the lumber supply upstream become exhausted, it was never given a name.

So it was never recorded on maps.

Outside of the locals, most people would never knew this village ever existed.

The two of them lived in a corner of that village.

A remote cottage, probably built by hand.

By their home is a small farm plot and chicken coup.

And a little garden.

I stood before the house.

Wanting to rush right in to talk with Aisha.

But I didn't.

Because a small body was standing guard.

Ars.

Wielding a real sword, staring daggers at me.

"..."

Killing intent shone in his eyes.
Never had I received that from my own blood.
For a moment, I thought of running home and cry.
Of course, I didn't...

"Ars."
"... Father."

Been a while, Ars, look how much you have grown.
Or is it just the outfit?
Equipped with adventurer-style leather jacket and sword, he look buff overall.
And there's a ferocity about him that he never had at home.
I guess we should talk.

"Ars... Do you think this is appropriate?"
"What is?"
"Your relationship with Aisha, running away, and this right here... you don't regret any of it?"
"Yes. I'm aware."

Ars nodded resolutely.
Without a bit of hesitation.
Tougher than my imagination.
He hadn't been merely clinging tightly onto Aisha without thoughts.
That kind of feeling.

"I do wish you could have shown the same attitude that day."
"Yes. I should have."
"If you did, I would have listened to what you had to say."
"That day, I wouldn't know what to say."

He immediately replied.

So what changed over the past year?

"You plan to spend the rest of your life with Aisha?"

"That's the plan. I love Aisha. Always causing her trouble, always needing her help and guidance. Of course, I'm grateful to father and the mothers, but I think I owe Aisha even more. If Aisha says she wish to spend the rest of our lives together, I'll certainly will spend the rest of my life protecting her."

No hesitation.

A lifetime wholly revolving around Aisha, a little worrying...

But, this attitude, and these words, if he had said it on that day, things would end up differently, probably.

Well, my refusal was of a different reason, so maybe they would eloped anyways...

But at least Eris probably won't had to beat Ars up.

No, maybe it was the experience from this past year, that helped him realized the capacity for those words.

Maybe it was for the best that he struggled with Aisha in an harsh environment like this.

Yet he's still so young.

It felt like he's putting into words before learning of the ways of the world.

Like a little kid confounded by reality, so instead threw a tantrum, because he overestimated his abilities.

"You think you can do that?"

"I can."

"I don't see it."

Speaking earnestly, Eris frown and looked at me.

"I'm different from a year ago."

He said, stubbornly standing over his doorstep, refusing to let us pass, refusing to let us take Aisha away.

Well, now that?

First, I should test whether he's really capable of what he says.

"... Then let me test whether you're lying or not."

Eris said what I was thinking, then stepped up before me.

Looked like she's not here to talk it out.

I nodded. She unsheathed the sword by her waist and pointed it at Ars.

The killing intent emanating from her was the real deal.

I can see Ars' face turning pale in an instant.

Not just his face. His legs, his entire body are quivering.

Yet despite so pale and spooked, he did not run.

"You can protect her?"

Eris only asked.

"I'll protect Aisha-nee."

Ars immediately answered.

"...!"

Eris made her move in the next instance.

With terrifying speed she striked at Ars.

A speed and timing beyond my reaction time.

Yet Ars reacted in time.

He deflected Eris' blade, but fell to the ground in doing so.

Even though he fell, Ars striked back at Eris' legs.

Blood spattered from Eris' foot.

But that alone won't stop Eris.

Stepping off her damaged foot, she striked down at Ars, still lying on the ground and unbalance.

From below Eris, the sound of meat being cleaved can be heard.

Not the clang off the back edge.

Blood sprayed. The soil around Eris' feet colored red.

Some even spattered onto my face.

An unforgiving sound, an unforgiving sight.

I'm going to lose Ars for good.

That thought made me tremble in silence.

But my worst fear did not pass.

Because in the next moment a shadow leaped between Eris' legs.

Ars.

Even with blood gushing out off his shoulders, he beared his teeth at Eris, showing unyielding fighting spirit.

"Hiiiyah!"

Once again, Eris attacked.

Completely ignoring the bleeding from her foot.

"Hiiyah!"

Ars also charged.

The wound on his shoulder was deep, staining his his cloth red, but he did not complain of the pain.

Eris' strike was stronger, faster.

Every time Ars deflected a strike, it seemingly shook his entire body and caused him to stagger.

At times he was sent flying, rolling, slightly injured, then kicked, or beat with the hilt. Soon enough he's covered with bruises.

But he refused to yield.

Keeping a distance, he would force himself back up, take his stance, then charge at Eris again.

Over and over again.

With such overwhelming power before him, Ars was covered in bruises.

Except for the initial strike at Eris' foot, none of his remaining attacks ever connected. Ars' utterly outmatched.

Yet Ars wasn't beaten.

Eris was no naive swordswoman.

Not taking Ars down, was it because he's her own son?

Holding back to avoid killing him?

Perhaps a little of both.

But more than that.

Not a spot on Ars that was not covered in injury.

He should have realized now, that Eris cannot be beaten.

But Ars refused to yield.

Refused to admit defeat.

I understand.

There's no other choice.

"... Ugh!"

The sound of metal clashing, and Ars' sword flew off his hand.

The sword flung across the sky and landed by my feet.

It surprised me.

Not just the sword, Ars' hand was still attached.
That hand, severed from his body, still clenched the sword tightly.

In that moment I wished to put a stop to this battle.
But even from afar, one can tell Ars would refuse to yield.
Even without a hand, he still crouched low, posing to fight with Eris once more.

Seeing this, Eris tosses away her sword.
And strikes at Ars with bare fists.

"UGGGGGHHHH!"

Ars rushed at Eris, shouting.
With no other option, he could only rush with all his strength.
In contrast, Eris looked calm.
A strike at the head and he fell to the ground. She jumped on top.

With her kneecaps to pressed down his hands, straddling him.
The next scene was one I was long familiar with.

"ORA ORA ORA ORA!"

With no ability to resist, Ars did nothing but take the beating. Refusing to yield, only screaming.
Eris continued the beating.
Raining down punches.
Beating him like a drum.
But eventually even those strikes began to lose their strength.
She must have grew weary as well.
Wildly mauling her own son.

"... Ugh."

Suddenly Eris' face exploded, flinging her back.

Eris juiced and stood back up. Her hair burnt. Her face charred.

Ars stood up too.

Face swollen, missing a hand, his legs wobbly, yet he stood.

He picked up Eris' sword lying by him and attempted to pose, but with his strength leaving him, the sword fell to the ground.

So he dragged the sword, falling and kneeling on several occasions, but always dragging his body back up.

But not towards Eris.

Running away?

No.

Where he headed, was home.

He moved to the doorstep. On his knees, he desperately tried to lift up the sword. But without any remaining strength, the sword only pointed the ground.

No longer in any condition to fight.

But the eyes under his hair still beamed, beaming at Eris and I.

"..."

That's enough.

Those words I wanted to say, but I swallowed them back down.

Eris said she'll handle this.

So she'll handle this.

I was to witness it till the end.

"What do you mean by this?"

Eris relaxed from her stance, crossed her arms and peered down.

Fill with remorse, Ars lifted his head at Eris and said.

"Even if it kills me... I won't let you pass..!"

"Really... As expected of Rudeus' son."

Suddenly, Eris raised her head and yelled.

"But that isn't protecting with everything you got!"

"... I know."

"Right now you, even if you have the desire, is incapable of protecting her!"

"... I know!"

"Then..."

Eris was unsatisfied.

But that face couldn't fool me.

Her face frowned, arms crossed, standing upright.

But she's certainly troubled.

Unable to properly convey what she wished to say, didn't know what she should say.

While I tried to make up my mind, Roxy stepped up.

She walked towards Ars, until she reached his line of sight, and said.

"You're saying that you're willing to give up your life to protect Aisha?"

"Yeah... That's right!"

"Challenge an opponent you have no hope of defeating, then die. Did you ever consider the feelings of Aisha you left behind?"

".... But what can I do?"

"Rudeus would have begged."

What she said so bluntly caused me to freeze up.

"He once challenged the Dragon God, Orsted-sama, losing both his magic armor and cannon in the process. On the edge of defeat, he begged for protection of his family on his hands and knees. That's what he done before Orsted-sama."

"... T-that's a lie. That's impossible? Father and Orsted-sama were always so close."

"It wasn't always that way."

Ars looked toward me.

Looking back, I nodded.

It's kind of embarrassing that my son knew of my past begging.

But that did indeed happened.

"And what would you do? Just go ahead and die in battle against Eris? And after your death? You're just going to ignore what happens to Aisha thereafter?"

"..."

She may been lecturing, but there's a kindness in her voice.

Ars looked at Roxy, at me, then Eris...

The sword fell off Ars' hand.

It fell on his thighs, then once more on the ground, clattering.

And in that moment tears flooded out of Ars' eyes, pouring.

Are those tears for recognizing how powerless he was?

Or something else?

And finally, Ars collapsed.

His body leaned forward, and Roxy caught him.

Fallen unconscious from exhaustion, probably.

Blood pooling around his feet.

Seeing my own son collapsed, atop a pool of his own blood, face swollen, yet nary a worry in my mind.

Rather, I want to praise him.

Indeed, Ars is immature.

And still weak.

His critical thinking remains naive.

Even if a battle to the death is not a particularly outlandish idea.

Indeed, he has grown up quite a bit in the past year, but he still has much to learn.

On the other hand, there're only a handful of people who can best Eris in battle.

Without his dominant hand, and after a straddled beating by Eris, fewer would have the will to continue to fight.

How far Ars was willing to go, I can appreciate that.

The resolution Ars held, was the same I had, when I challenged Orsted.

Until the end, even to death, to protect Aisha.

Perhaps his choices and actions were misguided.

But his heart was in the right place, like I was.

Certain emotions gush from within me on that thought.

This moment, I want to go hug and praise Ars.

Praise him for good fight.

Such an odd feeling.

Shouldn't I be scolding him right now, for eloping, for causing so much trouble for the family...

But Ars is no longer a child.

He might not yet stand on his two feet, but he has matured.

How happy that thought made me.

I guess I'm a little naive too.

"... Sylphy, can I leave this to you?"

"You don't have anything to say to Ars?"

Ars, that's enough.

I heard your thoughts.

I saw your resolution.

Your strength and determination were for all to see.

And Roxy had already said what I wanted to say.

I have no objections.

Even though I may have found Aisha's and Ars' relationship instinctively repulsive, I couldn't blame Ars for that.

There're many things I need to discuss with him, but that can wait.

The reason I came, wasn't just to evaluate Ars' growth.

It was also to talk with Aisha.

"First I need to speak with Aisha. Just the two of us."

"... Yes. I understand. Leave it to me."

Sylphy took from me a King Ranked Healing Scroll, retrieved Ars' severed hand, and headed toward the others.

I looked at Eris, and she turned back.

Hurry and go, her eyes read, tipping her head toward the house.

Roxy also looked at me and nod.

After nodding back, I turned toward the house and went.

Chapter 27

Aisha

Part 1

Aisha Greyrat was a genius at birth.

From the earliest days she could understand words.

Not just in language, but she quickly picked up everything her mother taught her.

She was also quick to understand why a subject might be useful.

Cleaning, laundry, language, math, history, geography, science.

She soaked up knowledge like a sponge.

She continued to excel even after the Teleportation Disaster.

Lilia and Aisha were transported to Shirone Kingdom.

Locked up by Pax Shirone for the crime of being acquainted with Roxy Migurdia and made into a maid.

Even though Aisha was still so young, Pax didn't concern himself and made her a maid.

But it worked out for her.

The maids of Shirino Kingdom pitied Lilia and young Aisha for how Pax persecuted them.

So they were more than generous to them, even though they popped out of nowhere.

Especially Aisha, they pitied her circumstance and went of of their ways to teach her all kind of things.

Aisha learned from them a variety of things.

Mostly on how to deal with people.

How to be polite.

How to thank people, how to make requests, how to refuse demands, how to welcome visitors, how to entertain guests.

The brilliant Aisha quickly appreciated how important these people skills were in life.

From Aisha's perspective, the world was simple.
She only needed to be taught once, and what wasn't she could easily copy and learn on her own.
Soon she realized everyone around her are far less capable.
Even though the maids taught her many things, they don't think very hard. Knowledge without intelligence.
Even though she had few chances to meet peers of her age, as far as she could tell, they're all lacking in both knowledge and intelligence.
Basically, Aisha thought everyone as a bunch of idiots.

As such, she was very pessimistic about her future.
Understanding her imprisonment by Pax, she saw a future clouded in darkness.
The alternative of serving her brother as her mother told, the one she no longer recognized and only memory of was that his fetish for girls' panties, was not much better.
But Pax was even more terrible than brother, that she could tell from Lilia's and the maids' actions.
She knew her fate if she had stuck around.

That's why, she acted to escape this predicament.
Even though there's little could be done using her little body.
If she didn't act soon, there might be no escape.

It was then she encountered Rudeus Greyrat, her older brother.

From then on, Rudeus became an special existence for Aisha.
The greatest person in Aisha's eyes.
Because Rudeus was always ahead of everyone.
Doing the impossible for average folks.
Even better than the self-professed genius Aisha would ever be capable of.
Top class magic, gentle demeanor, gaining great allies.
Yet he never shown conceit, always looking at things with a even keel.
Unlike her original assumptions, he's a respectable person.

With a brother like that, serving him won't be all bad.
Even the panties fetish was only minor details.
She thought.

Maybe it's the Suspension Bridge Effect.

Since Aisha was in midst of her first crisis.

Even though she learned many things from the maids, many others were still foreign to Aisha. Wandering in a strange city, caught by a man twice her size, and even seeing her life-saving letter tore to threads.

Princess rescued in that moment, of course she would like him.

It didn't actually matter to Aisha whether she would worked as a maid.

Aisha thought she would serve Rudeus, and like mother did, eventually gives birth to a son.
That wasn't ignorance.

Everyone have their own walks of life.

She's well aware of that fact, just that given her birth and upbringing, she just assumed that she would follow her mother's footsteps.

Of course, if Aisha wanted to do something else, Aisha could certainly developed in that direction.

But Aisha didn't have any particular dreams, nothing she couldn't have lived without.

What she desired, can be fulfilled with a small salary, which her brother were more than ample in providing.

Working under such a respectable person, getting paid for it, and given plenty of freedom.
Isn't that enough, she thought?

Since Aisha was capable of making it a reality, she easily accomplished it.

Then on, Aisha lived a comfortable life.

Housework, gardening, decorating.

And a particular knack for nurturing plants.

Soil, seeds, sunlight, and water.

The perfect combination to grow the ideal plant.

Even when the combinations are exactly the same, the flowers they produce will be different.

Nurturing plants no one have ever seen before was a challenge. But there always exists a reason for crop failures. There is always a better way to nurture a plant. Taking up that challenge gave Aisha plenty of fulfillment.

But most importantly, plants never complained.

Because Aisha hated unreasonable people that complained.

They just lagged behind.

That's right, from her youngest days, Aisha were already looking down at those less capable than her.

She liked competent people.

She hated incompetent people.

Only exception she made are for those, although less capable, still managed to accomplish something.

among those she acknowledge as her betters, the best was naturally Rudeus, and of course she liked him the best.

And of course, this "like" was different from love, a slightly twisted sort of feeling.

What twisted Aisha the most though, was being Lilia's child.

No matter how great Aisha was or what she accomplished, Lilia would never praise her.

Always putting Norn first, putting Rudeus first.

This messed with Aisha's mind.

Because she was always discriminated against, she was particularly sensitive to personal failure.

Constantly anxious that any failure would left her discarded or destroy her world view.

Because of this, she learned to quickly remediate every failure, or at least place the blame on someone else.

Of course, her feelings as Rudeus' little sister or desire to serve as the family maid were not faked.

She also felt joy, loneliness, and sometimes anger or tears.

It's just that her judgemental nature was always there.

She knew how to find capable people.

But she didn't understand what "love" meant.

She didn't understand what it meant to love someone.

She didn't understand what love was.

Part 2

Two turning points happened to that Aisha.

First was the birth of Ars Greyrat.

By then, Aisha already had plenty of experience with labor, having helped deliver Lucy and Lara.

The moment when life begins truly touches Aisha deeply.

Wow, how incredible!

Only on this particular point, but it truly touched her.

But Ars' birth was different.

Rudeus was not present then.

Even though that was Eris' first child, but she had plenty of strength, and Lilia and Aisha was assisting their third delivery.

If Rudeus there, Eris might have wasted her strength over frivolous things, so it probably would have been counterproductive.

But because of this, the first person who to hold Ars, was Aisha.

When she held him, it felt different from Lucy or Lara.

When Ars first cried out, an emotion she never felt before blossomed in her chest.

An indescribable feeling, a little painful, a little sad.

That feeling remained, after the safe delivery, after Eris fell back to sleep from relief, and even after Aisha went to bed.

She was up all night, eyes wide awake.

Stretching her arms above her, she tried to recall the sensation from carrying Ars.

The feelings on her hands were similar to Lucy and Lara.

But also subtly different, was it because he was a boy?

She didn't know.

But Aisha understood how happy it made she felt.

Tomorrow, come quickly, and let me greet that crying and bothersome Ars soon, she thought.

For her, there's something special about Ars.

But she couldn't say why...

Aisha changed that day.

No longer did she concern herself with what occupied her time in the past - her maid work, her hobbies, Onii-chan's requests, and consultation with the mercenary corp.

When asked for Aisha, the answer was always "taking care of Ars."

Maybe it's part of her maid work.

But for Aisha it was different.

Maybe it's a hobby of sorts? No, also different.

Because what she wanted was to see Ars. If possible, chat with him.

Grow up soon, she eagerly anticipated.

In that moment she realized, this was the first time she liked someone, for a reason other than their capabilities.

The other turning point was Norn's wedding.

Norn Greyrat and Ruijerd Supardia got married.

A marriage partner Aisha couldn't ever imagine.

A completely different race, and such a large age gap.

But Norn had said.

How she liked him since long ago.

Loved him.

Aisha didn't understand this word call "love."

Romance and love, these feelings were foreign to her.

Mother and Father, and of course she liked Rudeus.

Since their reunion in Shirone Kingdom.

But thoughts of marriage or kids were never on her mind.

If Rudeus wished to wed her, she certainly wouldn't refuse, but for her it would be a natural extension of her role as a maid.

Luckily, Rudeus wasn't interested and maintained a happy distance with her.
So she never understood what love meant.

When she told Norn that, Norn drew a blank.

Why you mean you couldn't understand? Her face seem to say.

Seeing that expression, Aisha felt a sense of defeat.

From a long time ago, Aisha disliked her older sister Norn.

Since very little, Norn was often more emotional than rational, and frequently made selfish demands.

Instead of being so demanding, she could had worked for it, but nary did she make the effort.

Compared to Onii-chan, She was just an idiot.

But whether it be mother or Zenith, they both treated Norn so much better than her.

Their birth had long decided their treatments.

Even if she accepted that, serving an idiot like Norn caused Aisha to pent up much stress.

Because Norn just kept tormenting Onii-chan and her.

That's why she didn't respect Norn.

Aisha would always tell the slow-witted Norn, "Why don't you get it?"

From their reunion at Milis, until Norn start boarding at Magic University, she always said to her.

Aisha must held the same blank expression back then too.

It's not like Aisha always wanted to win, just that sense of superiority was always there.

But this time, she felt defeat.

"Ah, I lost. It's my loss this time, Norn-nee."

Aisha came to conclusion.

Losing to Norn.

First time in her life admitting defeat to Norn.

Surprised she might be, she didn't regret it.

Because Norn must have matured too, while she's not around.

Norn must have learned many things in the Magic University, which Aisha did not attend.

Not just in magic, sword, history, math, and other subjects.

Because Aisha understood knowledge alone wasn't maturity.

And if needs be, Aisha could always catch up on knowledge.

Maturity came from something more fundamental.

Norn joined the student council and met many different people.

After listening to many other point of views, she no longer made selfish demands.

She learned to not let her emotions get the better of her decision making.

Yet she remained sensitive to the feelings of others, and always treated her juniors with respect.

Just like Rudeus...

Not as much as Rudeus, but no longer someone she could easily dismiss.

That's why she doesn't regret it.

Rather than regret, she felt envy.

Even if it's just a part of it, she understood something Aisha didn't, a place Aisha couldn't reach.

But even so, Aisha couldn't do it.

Because ultimately she didn't understand how "love" felt.

No marriage prospects.

That's why even though Aisha felt envy for Norn's marriage, she wouldn't do the same.

She would never experience the happiness that Norn has.

Aisha decided.

But that's alright.

She was plenty happy, no reason to change that.

After that, everyday remained to the same.

Working as a maid, taking care of Ars, occasionally making an appearance at the Mercenary Corp, or fulfilling Onii-chan's requests.

Just like always.

Probably till death.

Even after Lucy, Lara, and Ars got married.

Even after Lilia and Zenith pass away.

She would never get married, and live out her life as the maid of the Greyrat House.

It's fine.

She thought.

Because she must had already decided.

No matter who she liked, she could never truly find happiness.

Until she rid herself of the curse of her past, until she stopped treating people beneath her with contempt.

Or else she would never had purposely ran to Norn's room and asked her, "what does 'love' mean?"

That's how it should be.

"I want to marry Aisha-nee!"

Yet when she heard that from Ars, the only boy that she treated without contempt, it moved her.

Part 3

Ars' confession moved Aisha.

An emotion she couldn't fathom welled up in her chest.

She kept asking.

What was this feeling?

Ars was special.

No matter how often or how badly he failed, Aisha never despised him.

Of course, she was equally forgiving with other children of Greyrat House.

When Lucy failed, when Lara failed, Aisha's evaluation of them did not drop. At worst, only slightly.

But Ars was different.

When he fails, Aisha's evaluation of him rather rises.

But he does succeed, it rises doubly so.

Special.

Her evaluation rises regardless of his ability.

Just wholeheartedly likes him.

Wholeheartedly likes.... so love?

Maybe that is love.

When she realized that, nothing else seemed to matter, and that didn't bother her.

Aisha and Ars finally did that and cemented their relationship.

Initially, she did said to Ars that it was practice.

She shouldn't be doing those things to Ars, her instincts told her.

Rudeus was someone who deeply abhor that sort of relationship between family.

Even though she didn't know why, making a move on Ars would certainly made Rudeus angry.

After all, Ars was the firstborn son, and also Rudeus' precious baby boy.
One day he'll perhaps take over as head of the Greyrat House.
Or perhaps, like Ars mentioned once, married off to a princess of Asura Kingdom.

Aisha didn't think it was unreasonable.

Whether in Shirone Kingdom, Holy Kingdom of Milis, or even in Rude Mercenary Corp, political marriages were commonplace.

Political marriage didn't necessarily lead to unhappy ones.

Or rather, more often political marriages ended up mutually beneficial for everyone involved. Whether in wealth, or finding peace.

After the wedding, it's up to the newlyweds to make the effort.

As long as they showed each other proper respect, a happy marriage shouldn't be a problem.

In truth, Aisha knew many happily married couples that came from political marriages.

Even though her mind told her this, her body wouldn't cooperate.

Soon it happened a second time, and a third.

Ars began ditching school, but she failed to scold him, and Aisha herself quit doing work at the Mercenary Corp.

Initially she thought it shouldn't be continued, but on the other hand, she believed that she could put a stop it anytime she wanted.

But she couldn't.

Carried away by impulse, and unable to control her passion.

Even knowing they shouldn't let it continue, they did.

Without any sort of planning, they could at best exercise only the most temporary of caution.

In such circumstance their relationship was impossible to conceal for long.

Only that Rudeus discovered it even earlier than anticipated.

It was just practice.

Practice.

Those feelings were mere practice.

Neither Ars nor I were genuine, just carried away by a momentary lust.

That hurt nobody.

But Sylphy saw through the act.

Having her true feelings exposed, Aisha couldn't help but scream out how she loved Ars.

But she was too naive.

Even though she knew Rudeus would get angry, she thought that he would discuss and eventually forgive her.

Maybe even as far as permit their relationship.

She thought.

In truth, that was where Sylphy was hoping to lead the conversation toward.

But the reality was completely different.

Rudeus refused to allow their relationship.

Showing a stubbornness she never saw from him, he forcefully split them apart.

Aisha never saw Rudeus like that before.

Unreasonable, irrational, stubborn.

First time in her life, she found Onii-chan refusing to reason.

But the expression on his face was a familiar one.

One she would never forget.

It was the same grimness as he build the magic armour for battle with Orsted.

Seeing that expression terrified Aisha.

In that moment, she felt, maybe she had made an enemy of Rudeus.

No doubt.

Because she had destroyed what Rudeus worked so hard to build.

With that thought, she pretended to appease Rudeus.

But that fear remained.

Returning to her room, regaining her breath, Aisha felt a pain piercing her heart.

Ars and her would be tore apart thereafter.

Ars would attend school abroad and find a marriage partner there.

Or she would be married off to someone else.

Because she would have done the same, given the situation.

Both Ars and Aisha would be happier that way, right?

Suddenly she thought.

Happiness.

What is happiness?

How could I find my own happiness..?

Aisha also realized.

She made a mistake.

If their relationship were to continue, the only future that awaits them is an unhappy one.

Rudeus was right.

Ars and I need to separate.

No matter how it pains my heart.

If not, not only Rudeus, I would be betraying the whole family.

It was Sylphy, Roxy, and Eris that entrusted Ars' upbringing to me.

The kids that so respectfully called me Aisha-nee.

They're not special like Ars.

But they're also irreplaceable part of Aisha's life.

But Aisha also realized.

Without Ars, she definitely couldn't find her happiness.

She could no longer go back to the life she once had.

If she saw Ars finding happiness without her, she would certainly regret it.

If only she did something back then? She would think.

Thus Aisha found what her heart desired.

Happiness.

She decided to elope with Ars.

Part 4

That day she settled on a plan, and in that night she and Ars absconded.

Spreading misinformation till dawn, then they headed to Asura Kingdom as planned.

From Asura Kingdom they took another teleportation circle to the Kingdom of Dragon King.

In Kingdom of Dragon King, she made contact with Perugius' underling and gained their cooperation.

She snuck in the Mercenary branch at Kingdom of Dragon King, and used the teleportation circle there to return to Orsted's office.

From there, they teleported to Holy Kingdom of Milis.

Using contacts at the local Mercenary branch, they headed to a unnamed rural village.

They changed their names and identity, while maintaining the flow of false rumours, and her life with Ars began.

Perfection.

A place even Rudeus could not find.

Going this far to erase their tracks.

Adding all the disruptions behind the scene.

Even though she could do little about Perugius or Kirishika, at least Perugius agreed to cooperate.

Short of a promise, but at least he agreed not to actively involved.

A village located in the midpoint of a lumbering route.

Unrecorded on maps, in a few years it would simply disappear all together.

Based on the lumber industry, so when the industry shifts, so will the village.

Of course their identities were kept secret, and Aisha always kept abreast of latest intel.

If her intelligence network notifies her of any sign of trouble, they're readied to pick up and leave, erasing any traces they left behind.

Even with Rudeus as opponent, she had the confidence that he could never find her.

She would not fail.
It's fine.
So Aisha told herself.

A couple's life with Ars.
While very fulfilling, is this truly happiness?
Because a pain remained in her heart still.
Not due to her new life with Ars.
Although Ars was no longer as dependent on her.
Even though he smiled, there's always a tense mood about him.
A smile like Rudeus', a smile like Norn's.
But also different from their fulfilled smiles.
Her own smile was probably the same as Ars'.

Indeed, something is wrong.
This isn't happiness.
Why is this wrong?
I haven't failed.
She thought.
Refusing to get to the bottom of it, because she only did what she wanted to do.
Aisha refused to admit defeat.
Accepting that was impossible for Aisha.

Then Aisha got pregnant.

Her body grew heavier, and movement became more difficult.
No longer able to collect intel, it's only a matter of time before Rudeus found them.

Only then she did finally admit defeat.
Her life's greatest error, one she couldn't place on anyone else.
Because even in failure, she refused to blame Ars.
Her beloved and special Ars, she could never fault him.

Aisha's personal evaluation hit a low point.

No escape.

She might as well had abducted Ars.

Even though Ars might have come on his own accord, without a doubt they had betrayed Rudeus.

She could no longer look her family in the eyes.

Even if they meet again, there's no doubt she had betrayed everyone. She doesn't deserve to meet her family.

Ran away for a year, and now pregnant to boot.

Utterly unforgivable.

Aisha gave up.

Part 5

--- Rudeus' Point of View ---

Aisha lays flat on a bed.

It's small and modest.

The blanket and bed sheets are in Aisha's preferences.

A small figure and potted plant lined the windowsill.

From there sunlight shines, bathing Aisha's face and hair.

Seeing Aisha, I could understand.

How we managed to find Aisha and Ars.

If she really tried, I don't think anyone would ever find them.

In truth, they have already hid themselves for well over a year.

So was they suddenly found?

The answer was obvious with just one look at her.

Lying flat her back, a bump is visible on Aisha's belly.

She's pregnant.

Hampered by pregnancy, she could no longer maneuver freely about.

A chink in the armor.

"... So unexpected of Aisha."

Those words snuck from my lips.

Rare to see a mistake by the normally flawless Aisha.

She couldn't move if she's pregnant.

Aisha should had anticipated that.

After helping Sylphy and others with their pregnancies, she's no doubt aware.

Even if she hadn't experienced it personally, she could have at least expected it.

"That was what I thought too. Spent rest of my life with Ars. Even brother would never find us..."

"..."

"But I can't do anything right..."

Aisha looking down, rubbing her own belly.

"Because I like Ars. Even knowing the consequences of getting pregnant, I still desired it. It was wonderful. Because I love Ars."

Dark circles under Aisha's eyes.

She must have struggled.

She knew what can't happen, but she couldn't help herself.

Even if her mind was set, her body could do little to resist, and this was the consequence.

She couldn't help herself.

"Hey, Onii-chan, what's it all about, anyways?"

"Who knows, really? But I was the same way when Sylphy and I got married."

"Really... Then, it really was love."

Love.

Is it? I don't really know.

I suppose love and lust are two sides of the same coin.

Ultimately, they're both instincts.

"Why didn't you tell anybody?"

"They wouldn't approve. I knew it from the start."

"They might."

"They won't. I done wrong. No one would support me."

Even if Lilia strongly rejected them, Sylphy might had approved.

If we talked it out beforehand, maybe even I won't have been so stubborn.

"Hey, Onii-chan, is Ars alright?"

"... Yeah, but he did get a beating from Eris."

"I see. Ars is her baby boy... I'm glad he's fine..."

Aisha could finally breath a sigh of relief.

"Onii-chan, what's going to happen next?"

"Still thinking about it."

"No way for you to ever forgive me?"

"Sure I can."

"How? I'm about to birth a child for your precious baby boy!"

"The fault wasn't yours alone, that you had elope. I was wrong, and so was Ars---"

"Ars did nothing wrong. He was small. I seduced him and got him to do as I desired. It was my fault. Onii-chan, surely you knew that?"

"... Ars isn't a little kid anymore."

Even though he's still not yet mature, he's no longer that timid boy he was.

That boy decided on his own accord to be here.

No lies could decide that for him.

"Certainly Onii-chan refuses to acknowledge the baby in my belly."

"True, I hate to accept it. But, well, it can't be helped. What's done's done."

"You're not going to cut my belly open, pull the embryo out, and kill the baby?"

"Nobody would do that..."

"They do. The aristocracies in Milis do. If there's an unwanted pregnancy, they'll drug the mother, cut the belly, abort the baby, then use healing magic to stitch her back up. But with a degraded healing magic to ensure that she may never be pregnant again."

"Wow, how horrifying... Eh, well, I guess it's a form of abortion."

"Then you'll split Ars and I apart... No, wait, you're going to kill me?"

"I won't kill you. Stop that! Why do you keep imagining all these terrible things? Don't! Do you really think I would do anything like that?"

"But I betrayed you, Onii-chan! I seduced and abducted your most precious, that made you took arms against Orsted-sama, and made him my own! I knew family is everything to Onii-chan! You would never forgive the ones that caused us harm! I knew it when I saw Onii-chan's anger a year ago! I took your most precious, ruined it, and became your enemy.

Yet, I thought I could survive, as long as I run away. But with my belly growing bigger by the day, I could no longer move about freely. No longer able to keep tabs on intel or the Mercenary. So terrified, I can no longer sleep, only wondering when Onii-chan will finally show. I could do nothing. My legs even refused to move today...!"

Aisha's voice was filled of sorrow.

I don't remember Aisha ever so pessimistic.

What changed in the past year?

No, perhaps it's morning sickness talking for her.

I should calm her down.

"Aisha, it's purely a fight between siblings. Yes, we might have overdid it a little, but I never saw you as my enemy, ever."

"But that day a year ago, you looked so terrifying. Like if someone had the audacity to belittle Roxy's race in front of you."

I unconsciously rubbed my chin when I heard that.

Really?

I looked like that?

Eh... I did that to Aisha...?

Yes, that did happen. I was irrational, and my emotions got the better of me. Perhaps I did act that way.

"... Well, how about now?"

"Like the day Norn got married."

"Okay, that works."

Saying that, I sat myself by the bed.

Lightly I paddled Aisha's stiffen legs.

Even though it sent shivers down her spine, Aisha did not resist.

Thin, yet strong. In the past year, these legs had traveled many roads. Her skin was a bit dry.

She's still shivering.

"Aisha. That kind of relationship between siblings is something I still can't get a handle on."

"Oh..."

"But that was due to my life's experience. Just that in my case, it was far worse, shameful, more one-sided, and even less unforgivable. So naturally I was yelled at, beaten, and abandoned... It was because of what happened back then, that I found it so instinctively repulsive."

If we're going to talk, I probably should start from the very beginning, but these words easily slipped out my mouth somehow.

In some ways, that was the start of it all.

And I guess it ended up well for me.

Even though I could never erase what had happened.

Nor could I ever apologize for what I done.

But how do I explain my past?

If I just declare in such a solemn situation, "Actually, I came from a different world!"

Certainly no one would believe me.

Rather, they'll just be flabbergasted and wondering what game I'm playing.

"Ah, this was about Onii-chan's previous life in another world?"

I stopped patting her legs out of surprise.

"... I mention this before?"

"Based on the conversations with Nanahoshi, and the actions of Onii-chan with Orsted-Sama, I figured it out."

"Oh... I see."

So Aisha would understand?

She certainly has a knack for figuring things out...

"You been hiding it."

"I'm afraid to tell, especially with mother. All the pain she suffered for her baby, whom turns out a grown man. She'd despise me... Wouldn't you think so?"

"Not really. Orsted-sama also has memories of his past lives. It's rare, but it does happen. It's not like your personality changed suddenly or something. To me, Onii-chan has always been Onii-chan. Even if you end up a few years older, it's not a big deal."

"I see... Thank you."

I guess you could think of it that way.

Certainly, this world has had quite a few reincarnations, including Orsted.

Nothing so strange about adding me to that list.

"I doubt anyone would be overly shocked. Sylphy-nee will be fine, Roxy-nee will be fine.... Eris-nee, I am not too sure about her."

Eris already overheard about my past...

But she promised to kept it a secret.

She must had kept it.

"... Really?"

"So why not tell them? Everyone would probably just say, 'is that all?'"

"Because I'm already Rudeus? Imagine if the baby in your belly have memories of his previous life, won't you find that repulsive?"

"If he protects us as well as Onii-chan did, I won't mind."

"Oh, really..."

Is that all?

I thought it would be repulsive.

But maybe I just hate my old self.

So I keep imagining someone like me.

Aisha raised herself up and dragged her body next to mine.

"Want to tell me the whole story?"

"Sure."

With that said, I stood up, grabbed a chair nearby, and sat myself in front of Aisha.
Sitting in front of Aisha, I took a look at her belly.
Looks like she'll be in labor soon.

"In my previous life, I was a human scum. When I was young, I was pretty normal, but starting middle school---"

One by one, I told her everything about my past life.
What kind of person I was, my state of mind when I came to this world.
What still pained me in my heart, and what I managed to overcome.

It wasn't a long conversation.
Even though I spent thirty-four years in my previous life, it was nothing special.
While I was at it, I also talked about this life.
How Paul helped me.
How I felt when I found Norn.
How I felt about Lilia and Zenith.
And how I accepted Aisha as sister, as family.

Aisha listened in silence.
She chipped in the conversation at time, but mostly listened in silence.

"That's how, I ended up with a happy life that I didn't have in my past life. These days are precious to me."

I said in summary.

"Onii-chan is really incredible."

"Really?"

"If Onii-chan kills me right here, and I reincarnates, I wouldn't have tried so hard."

"... I said I won't already."

"I can't start a family."

"Really?"

"Yes. Even though I love Ars. I definitely can't start a family with Ars here."

What's this all about?

Ars love Aisha, swore to protect her.

But Aisha thinks differently?

"When Ars was born, I was so happy. But that wasn't love then, not what I feel now."

Now it's Aisha's turn to tell her life's story.

How excited she was when Ars borned.

Eagerly waiting for him to mature, protecting his everyday happiness.

Watching him grow day by day.

Then one day, out of the blue he confessed to her.

Since that day they threw caution to the wind.

Even though it's wrong, they lived uninhibited lives.

Then I found out.

Rejected in the family meeting, utterly defeated, yet she still likes Ars... wants happy lives with him.

So they eloped.

Then she got pregnant, and realized she's wrong.

This won't lead to happiness.

They just trapped themselves in misfortune.

Aisha's voice felt faint.

She seemed ready to give up the struggle.

"... There's two things I must ask you."

"Okay."

"Has Hitogami ever contacted you?"

During our discussion, I suddenly thought of the possibility.

Hitogami could easily interfere during the weakness bore by pregnancy.

If they eloped under the advice of Hitogami...

That'd make me really happy!

It was all his fault! So come home!

I would say.

"No, never. It was my idea."

"Is that so..."

Well, of course.

I have always cautioned them against Hitogami's advice.

Even without Hitogami's prodding, Aisha would have decided to elope anyways.

"And the other?"

"You didn't use contraception?"

"Onii-chan, there's only so many ways to buy the contraptions you made, I'll leave a trail if I did."

"Oh, you're right."

Even though there's a stash in the basement, for everyday use they're difficult to acquire.

"Can I ask one more?"

"But you already asked two... okay, fine."

"Are you happy?"

Aisha looked down after listening.

Her mouth closed, her face serious.

Then she said.

"I'm."

She is.

Happiness.

Aisha is, even though she knew this happiness couldn't continue.

No, it was because she has no other choice, it was for happiness that they eloped.

"If I didn't find you, would you have stayed happy?"

"..."

Aisha shook her head meekly.

"To this day, Ars lets me control him like a puppet, and I probably would never change either... In that case... probably..."

"I see."

I cleared my throat and stared right at Aisha.

"... Time for the main topic."

Aisha also looks back at me.

Even with the dark circles on her eye, there's an intensity in her eyes.

Different from before when she's ready to face death.

It's resolution.

"I have two wishes.

Please forgive Ars.

And also, the baby in my belly, please let him live."

Aisha rubbed her belly when she mentioned it.

She will be in labor any time now.

The baby will be born soon.

"..."

"I... I deserve death... or at least, punishment. I'm grateful that Onii-chan still sees me as family, but what I have done was unforgivable."

From a forward position, I leaned back.

With my back against the chair, I looked up towards the ceiling.

Trying to organize my thoughts.

Quickly organize what I want to say.

It's been a year. I had a year to think it.

"I think, given my past, I can't accept your relationship with Ars."

"Yes."

"Even without my past, I can't help but feel that you have betrayed my trust."

"Yes."

"But I'll give you my blessings."

"... Huh?"

"Even though I still find it difficult to accept, but I also understand my own internal scars.

It's a emotional thing, so let's put emotions aside."

"No, that's not right. You shouldn't forgive me... This isn't just an emotional issue... If you forgive me, it'll ruin the reputation of Greyrat House. Greyrat House's fame was hard won; we must protect it."

"I don't really care about that..."

"It's not just Onii-chan. Lucy, Lara, Sieg, Lilia, and Zenith... They would also be unhappy. It might even cause them harm... That's why, punish me. So you can speak the truth when asked."

It kind of bothers me that Aisha insists on this.

Has she ignore how I treated her as family?

"No matter how twisted I become, I'll never abandon my family. If anyone ever dare to demand you killed, I will kill him. Doubly so if anyone dare to touch my children."

I straighten up, and looked towards Aisha.

Aisha stared at me wide eyed.

"Aisha. This time, you made a mistake. Eloping was the worst choice. But you also said it too, you had no other. It might be the first time you felt so trapped, but for average folks like me, it's common place. The mind is telling me no, but my body is telling me yes. Even when you know it, you can't do what's right."

Staring right at Aisha, I continued.

"If you have eloped with someone else's son, or if Ars became an invalid as a result, even I don't know what I would do to you. But Ars has become strong. He's maturing properly. Ars is a child of my house, but so are you. Because both of you belong in my household, I instinctively find it repulsive. But also because you're both in my household, this problem should stay in the family."

I laid out every scenario.

Even though I don't want to be emotional, I guess it's an inherently emotional topic. Now that I laid it all out there, I reached for my conclusion.

"This was a family problem, nobody has to die."

Aisha listened in silence, lips wired tight.

Tears began to flow from her eyes.

But Aisha quickly wiped them away.

"Let's figure it out, one problem at a time."

"Okay."

Aisha nodded.

Let's resolve this rationally.

Let's speak calmly and composed.

"First problem is Ars. He's my precious son, and he's still young. Making a move on him was wrong."

"Yes."

"But everyone grows up eventually. Even though you said Ars hasn't changed, I can tell how much more capable he became in the last year. Even if he's still immature in some ways. But same goes for everyone. Everyone is a little immature. Same goes for you. Do you accept your own immaturity for what happened?"

"Yes."

"Since he's still immature, Ars should continue his education. I hope that'll help him grow up. I will not allow for marriage before he reach adulthood. This I'm adamant on."

At the minimum, Ars still can't protect Aisha.

Even though he wants to, even though he has the will, he's still incapable.

He needs to toughen up, but I'm sure he's aware of that now.

That is plain to see, given the state of Aisha.

Even emotionally, he's not there to protect Aisha.

... Wait, was I ever there for my wives emotionally?

Put that aside for now.

"Until he graduates and become an adult, until he has a job and be independent, then I'll allow for your marriage. No, marriage alone won't be enough, since you would already have a child. I won't accept anything but complete effort."

"Ars is the firstborn son. What about the family legacy?"

"Greyrat House has no rules about that. We can have Lucy lead the family, or Ars can with you as his supporting wife."

"Surely, that's impossible? I'm just but a maid."

"If being maid is an issue, I'll just fire you. Honorable discharge as result of marriage."

"Haha, what?"

Aisha smiled.

Barely there, but she smiled.

"Next, your problem."

"... Em."

"First, you didn't discuss it with anyone. Whether it was making a move with Ars, or eloping, you never discussed it with anyone. If you did your ground work, someone would have stood up for you when I won't budge. If you did that, I could have prepared myself."

"... That's right. Why didn't I do anything? ... Maybe with Onii-chan as my opponent, I didn't want to use tricks?"

Why are you asking me?

Well, it would really have bothered me if someone stifled my objections.

"And your eloping caused everyone a lot of trouble."

"... Everyone's angry?"

"Everyone is worried about you."

"... Then what should I do?"

"Well, reflect on your actions. What to do after making a mistake. How to correct your errors. Apologize."

"Would I be forgiven if I apologize?"

"Talk it out first. That's up to the other side to decide."

In particular, Lilia.

The grandmother of the house was emotionally scarred by what happened.

There's no escape from that discussion.

"And you should have waited. Ars was just too young for that."

"... I know."

"But maybe you're at that age when it made you anxious."

"No, that's not... Probably not. I can't explain it..."

"... Regardless, at least wait until he becomes an adult. When Ars comes up to me and say, 'I'm independent now. Let me marry her.' and even I'll.. promptly refuse, but ultimately I'll cave. Because nobody will be doing anything wrong then."

Well, I might still be unreasonable and refuse. Lilia certainly wouldn't approve, but put that aside for now.

But at least I won't demand their separation.

And they won't have to elope.

Ultimately, Sylphy or Roxy would make me reconsider.

"And finally... my problem. I was also wrong."

"Onii-chan did nothing wrong."

"I always told you to live as you like. Yet as soon as we have our disagreement, I expected you to relent. That was wrong. I should have sorted my own feelings first before deciding."

"It couldn't be helped that things turned out that way. I was timid."

Em, I should remember that.
I need to reflect on my actions.

"Is there anything else, now that we said all that?"

"... Onii-chan, you need to communicate with your kids better."

"Ahh... You're right. Em... even though I don't know what to talk about, I'll try to make the time."

Looking over what happened, I could have talked more with Ars.
If Ars trusted me more, maybe this wouldn't have to happen.

Not just Ars.
Other children as well.
I should be more aware of what's going on with them.

"Anything else?"

"..."

"If not, how about we head home?"

"..."

"What to do with you and Ars, how about we decide it as a family again?"

"..."

Aisha held a troubled expression.
Is there some concerns we haven't discussed?
But without bringing up anything else, she nodded.

"Okay. I understand."
"Then I'll tell them to come in."

I stood back up.
After we get home, convince Lilia and let things return to normal...
That's not going to happen.
There's no going back.

Because a lot has changed.

The family grows by one.

Things change.

And when that happens, all we can do is move forward.

"Onii-chan."

"Em?"

While I was thinking that, Aisha called for me.

Turned around, Aisha's face a mess, in tears she said.

"Sorry."

"Em."

"I'm sorry... I'm an idiot... So sorry."

"..."

I walked toward Aisha, whose tears gushing out, and patted her on her head.

Aisha kept crying.

Sylphy and the others, who came in out of concern, were also crying.

Maybe because of how exemplar she always been, I never noticed, but my youngest sister might be a bigger baby than her older sister.

With that, the case of Aisha and Ars running away came to a close.

Chapter 28

Aisha Greyrat

Part 1

Brought those two home.

As soon as she saw Aisha with a swollen belly, Lilia fell.

Not fainted, simply completely collapsed on the floor, but immediately she got back up and head to the kitchen, wielding a large knife on her return. I had rushed to disarm her.

"Let me go! Now that it comes to that, this is the only way I can make amend..!"

As she shouts, I snatched the knife from her hands. I hurried to explain what happened after Aisha eloped, what we already talked about, and that I have accepted their relationship.

After the explanation Lilia finally calmed down, visibly exhausted.

Then she fell asleep.

Her face so pale, it made you wonder if Lilia had always been so frail?

I suppose after spending a year in anxiety, it got the better of her.

While nursing Lilia, I carefully gave her my views on the matter.

Indeed, there are various opinions on the marriage between close relatives.

But the feelings between Aisha and Ars are mutual and sincere.

In the past year, Ars gained a sense of resolution, and Aisha also had grown.

And I, I would like them to have the freedom to live their own lives.

Lilia listened in silence as I slowly explained everything bit by bit.

"I was an unfaithful woman, seducing Paul-sama, hurting Zenith-sama."

"I think that's why my own daughter would think to make a move on Ars-sama."

"All I could think about in the past year, was if only I hadn't given birth to that child."

"Of course, I didn't plan to actually say that to Aisha. Zenith-sama had already scolded me once for saying so already."

Zenith was sitting on a chair in Lilia's room.

Same as always, looking dazed, at nowhere in particular.

I don't know when that conversation took place.

But even in her condition, Zenith could understand our conversation, could act upon it.

Words like "if I only haven't gave birth to that child" would certainly drew a beating.

Even I would be angry.

Because it robbed the purpose of the conversation Paul, Zenith, Lilia and I had on that particular day.

It would erase our happiness on the day when Norn and Aisha were born.

"It's one thing for her to seduce Ars-sama, but now that her belly is already so big, there's no turning back."

"... In the end, that girl is indeed of my blood. Seducing the master she swore to protect, buying rank with her body in exchange. It's all because of lowborn, lecher blood flowing in her."

"Even if she didn't intent to seduce Ars-sama... Aisha had no doubt manipulated Ars-sama."

I told her that she's wrong.

Aisha wasn't lowborn.

It was an accident.

The relationship just happened to be between master and servant.

If you like someone, you naturally want him to like you back.

And if you work hard at it, naturally he'll respond, even if he didn't feel the same way before.
It's only natural.

Aisha and Ars were always close, only an age gap separated them.

Indeed, Ars was a little too young, but Aisha wasn't much better. She might be older, but her heart was still young.

That's how I persuaded her.

"Rudeus-sama, what should I do?"

I replied, I have already accepted them.

So Aisha, Ars, and Lilia should sit down and calmly talk it out.

Find an understanding.

He maybe young, but Ars was also acting on his own initiative.

Aisha worked hard to love Ars in her own way.

Even if she had pushed Ars to fall for her, her feelings for him were no lie.

"I understand."

Then should I bring them over?

Or should we wait for a bit?

"Right now is fine."

With that said, I headed out the room.

I called out to Aisha and Ars, whom were waiting meekly in the living room. The children had them surrounded, peppering them with questions.

"Come."

"What happened?"

I explained Lilia's current condition and her thoughts on them.

She believed it was her fault that Aisha turned out like this.

And that Ars was definitely fooled by Aisha.

That she's in dismay over what happened.
And that they should have a proper talk with Lilia.
They nod in agreement and stood up.

I stopped them before they left the living room.

"Eh, what is it?"

Several things that you must discuss.

First, three things Ars must remember.

You are not visiting your grandma anymore, but the mother of your loved one.
It was because you couldn't protect your loved one, that you're in current predicament.
You need to ask the mother sincerely, for the hand of her daughter.

And three things Ars must understand.

How worried you made everyone around you.

What you have done wrong.

And also what Aisha did wrong, and what her weaknesses are.

Then you need to consider.

How you'll protect Aisha from now on.

And what you still have to learn.

To accomplish these points, he must learn how Lilia felt.

He must have a heart-to-heart with the mother that raised Aisha, whom more than anyone else worried over her.

If she won't approve, he must convince her.

If he wishes to be with Aisha, he must pass that test.

"Okay! I get it!"

Ars nods. He reminds me of Eris.

Aisha, confide to her, all that you said me about what you felt since eloping.
Don't employ silence or lies to avoid a confrontation.
Even if Lilia gets angry, even if she becomes agitated, bear it, and talk it out.
Have a true heart-to-heart discussion.

"I understand."

Aisha and Ars nod in earnest.

Watching them walk away, I silently murmured, "do your best!"

Afterwards, I do not know what Aisha, Lilia, and Ars talked about.

They spoke for a significant duration, five, six hours, maybe even more.

Several times I could hear Lilia screaming.

Aisha raised her voice once as well.

But ultimately as time passed, the shouting lessened, and eventually stopped.

And it was over.

When she came down stairs, Lilia looked utterly exhausted, near complete collapse, but her heart had finally accepted them.

Part 2

Afterwards, Aisha and Ars apologized to rest of the family.

Sorry that we made you worried.

Sorry that we caused you trouble.

Sorry that we betrayed you.

They kept their heads down throughout.

Nobody really pushed the issue over what happened.

Even though Lucy glared at Ars, and Norn scolded Aisha.

Ultimately everyone breathed a little easier.

Then it was time for Aisha's and Ars' punishment.

It's a bit complicated.

First, cut off the relationship with Aisha.

For her to be removed from the family name.

This was on Aisha's own suggestion.

The traitor must be punished.

True in every world.

Aisha also suggested ruining the traitor's reproductive organs, but I flatly refused it.

Instead, after Aisha gave birth, she'll lose her family name and be banished.

By banished, I mean she'll attend Asura Royal Academy.

From the ordeal, she realized her own immaturity.

Become a more wholesome individual from school... Maybe not that far, but she felt she need a fresh start with her education.

Learn how to better empathize with others, she explained.

Also as punishment for what happened, her child will be left in my care.

Until Ars can stand on his own two feet, she would not reunite with her child.

After giving birth, she'll only have a brief respite with the child.

That was Aisha's punishment.

Aisha said I'm letting her off easy, but I thought that would be enough.

Because I myself understand the pain of not being able to see one's own flesh and blood.

Well, even if it's for Aisha's own good, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the innocent child torn from his mother.

Poor child.

Of course, I'll dutifully care for him...

But it still might leave the child scarred for life.

Now that I thought about it, is this really necessary? Just let Aisha stay home and flirt with Ars. I thought of that too.

But this time, Aisha really ought to accept some punishment.

She must understand the consequences of her actions, and have them carved deep in her heart.

Given that, the only thing I could do is to shower the child with even more love than a mother can provide.

Of course, just because we banished her doesn't mean I abandoned her.

After separating from Ars, can Aisha survive and grow on her own?

I look forward to finding out.

This time she definitely can do it.

Ars returned to school after he came home.

He didn't receive an equal punishment, in consideration of his age.

But neither physically or mentally, he could be Aisha's support.

I hope he would properly reflect on what happened, and use that as motivation to mature.

And once Ars graduates and becomes an adult, once Eris and I determines that he can live independently, then he can go do as he pleased.

If he wants to go off to Asura Kingdom and bring back Aisha for marriage, I'll allow it.

As expected, Ars hated the idea of separating from Aisha.

But after the result of his battle with Eris, after seeing the dark circles under Aisha's eyes, he timidly agreed.

Even though he may not be ready in mind or body, at least his will and fighting spirit are already there.

Ars will definitely grow up and marry Aisha.

If after growing up he lost interest in Aisha, I'd make him pay for knocking her up.

To the public, I announced that Ars got engaged, and Aisha married off somewhere. No reason to air our family's dirty laundry to strangers, or cause more trouble for the children... Aisha said.

After that I brought Ars and Aisha to various places to apologize.

All the people involved in the search.

Explained to them what happened.

Of course due to the trouble they caused, I also explained the punishments for Ars and Aisha.

Like always, Zanoba laughed happily and said, "Hahaha, you found what's most important!"

Ariel inquired, "Since you banished Aisha, can I pick her up?"

Orsted simply nod, looking fearsome as usual.

Alek apparently managed to track down Kirishika in the Demon Continent, and was about to boast to me on her whereabouts, but it's a little late for that.

Ruijerd felt conflicted about the whole situation, so he finally could breathe a sigh of relief. Perugius just snickered, "Ha! So you got caught!" Speaking of which, in this particular situation surrounding Aisha's disappearance, even though he wasn't active, he seems to have given Aisha a hand. I should really just snitch him to Orsted...

When we went to the Mercenary Corp, those that took Aisha's side had their tails stiff and wouldn't look me in the eyes.

This bunch of traitors.

The original purpose of the Mercenary Corp was to expand Orsted's influence throughout the world.

With so many traitors, should I just clean house?

Though it was a passing thought, I was aware of the possibility of traitors from the beginning.

Since this organization was originally created from specifically to counter Hitogami.

In the first place, Aisha wield everyone's weakness as protection against Hitogami's ability to turn people.

Even though Aisha used that power to do something naughty...

But this time, I'll let the Mercenary Corp off easy. Since there are individuals that stuck by my side, like Rinia and Pursena. This way they all owe me one.

Conversely, even if I tried to clean house, there's so many branches all over the world. It would just be a hassle. Since many had knowledge of the teleportation circles and telecommunication tablets, it may cause even greater trouble.

Speaking of Rinia and Pursena, they're busy scolding all the traitors.

Even though they didn't contribute either...

All the Corp members that took Aisha's side, while they're terrified of the consequences of betraying me, none of them tried to blame Aisha or said things like, "I was only following orders", or "I was threatened."

Rather, they all adored Aisha.

I hope Aisha would better appreciate their sentiments next time.

Regardless, no one was angry.

Just a little uneasy.

After the apology tour, Aisha gave birth.

Part 3

The son of Aisha and Ars.

He'll be my first grandchild, a son.

Named Leroy.

Leroy Greyrat.

Intelligent like Aisha, but with a perverse fondness for large breasts like Ars. Similar to both his parents in a way, he's a rowdy boy.

Originally I suggested naming him after his parents, or maybe grandparents, but Aisha laughed it off as something only Onii-chan would do.

Still, my first grandchild, it doesn't feel real yet.

After all, Chris was but a baby merely a few years ago.

It feels more like a new child instead.

Somehow I'm already a grandfather...

Aisha sure knows how to take care of babies.

Hard to believe that this was her first.

But not wholly unexpected, since I had relied on her from Lucy until Chris.

Not that she was alone in the effort, but she always had a knack for it.

As expected, she had the knack as mother too.

Of course, all the women in the family helped with child rearing.

Despite what happened, everyone welcomed Leroy and dotes on him.

That makes me happy.

In particular was Lilia, who did a complete 180 as soon as Leroy was born.

You would never believe she once fervently opposed Aisha's and Ars' relationship, seeing how she spoiled Leroy.

Not that I don't understand it.

Since Lilia and I don't have blood relations, Leroy is her first grandson.

If it wasn't for the fact that Ars was my son, there would be no reason for her to ever resist doting him.

Even though Lilia is happy, I'm getting worried that he'll be spoiled rotten at this rate.

Ars is diligently learning how to change diapers.

Right now he's eagerly learning from Aisha and Lilia how to raise a child.

Even though I agreed to raise him, I'll mostly leaving that to Ars.

Of course, I'll be supporting him from the side.

But ultimately, Ars needs to be able to handle his job as a parent.

Even though he's twelve, he's already a father, there's no escape from the responsibility.

Ars is self aware of this point, and giving it his all.

Attending school like normal, training even harder with Eris. Working hard in other aspects as well.

One day, he'll catch up with Aisha.

"..."

Are my kids all going to get married off, one after another? How many gaggles of grand kids will I have?

Even though Ars might be a bit early, but Lucy has already reached marriageable age.

Although Clive and her dated, now that he's off to Milis, I'm worried that they will grow apart.

Maybe they have committed to something before separating, but reality could be cruel.

Maybe Lucy would find new love when boarding at Asura Royal Academy, and end up dating someone else.

Lara doesn't seem particularly inclined in that direction... But she also seems like the type of kid that would suddenly bring a boy home.

Leo still sticks to her like glue. Maybe Leo will help her find someone...

A little too early for Sieg and the rest.

Still, seeing Ars already is a father at his age, would the other ones try to one-up him?
That I do not know.

Maybe it'll happen again, another prospect with a complicated background.
Since she's such a daddy's girl, maybe she'll end up bringing a fat 34 year old NEET home...

I might feel repulsed and flatly reject him, but eventually I'd have to have a proper talk with her.

If he's a NEET, maybe we could get along rather well.

No, more than making good conversations, what matters is his strengths.

"Ah, my breasts. Leroy you're such a brat."

"Aisha, don't spoil him."

"Yes, mother."

Leroy is happily burying his face in Aisha's chest.

Lilia sits by, smiling warmly.

Ars has a "it can't be helped" look on his face.

Don't act like that, you're exactly the same when you're little.

... Eh?

Don't tell me Leroy will make a move on Lilia or Chris when he turns ten...?

I'll be a great-grandfather by forty?

No, no, that's impossible.

That won't happen again in this household.

"..."

Well, I don't know how it'll turn out, and there's no way to predict the future.

If that happens again, maybe I'll get a better handle on it than this time.

Looking at the blessing before me, I couldn't help but wonder.

Part 4

Then it's time for separation.

Aisha switched to a travel outfit, completely different from what she wore as a maid, carrying a baggage on her back.

In it only a few select cloth and personal items from her room.

But no maid costume.

The maid costume she had wore for so long is now stored in the basement.

"Goodbye, Leroy..."

Aisha hugs Leroy.

The boy she only spent a few short days with.

Even though she once said the punishment was too light, but as she hugged Leroy, tears still flood out.

Seeing this, I knew that Leroy wasn't a unwanted boy, and couldn't help but cry also.

"Well... mother, Onii-chan, I'll leave Leroy to you."

Aisha hands Leroy to Lilia.

Leroy looks blankly at Aisha.

But as if realizing something, he suddenly cries out.

Instincts tell him that his mother is leaving him.

Aisha could only kiss the crying Leroy on the cheek.

"Ars, do your best."

"Yes!"

Ars answered.

He's still small.

He now reached Aisha height-wise.

When they reunite, he'll probably be even taller.

"Well, everyone, I'm heading out."

To those seeing her off, Aisha finally said, "I'm heading out."

Not good bye, not I'm sorry, just that I'm heading out.

That makes me glad.

Aisha steps by the gate, and turns around once more.

Looking at me, the three wives, and the kids.

She slightly bowed.

Then after touching Beat by the gate, she leaves.

"... Hey, Sylphy, Roxy, Eris."

When I head back in, I called out to the three wives.

They all stopped to look at me.

Looking surprised.

"I have something I must say. Can you come to the bedroom?"

"... Is it important?"

"Yes, very important."

Maybe not absolutely necessary.

That's what I still believe.

But I do want to tell.

After telling Aisha, I must tell them too.

About memory of my past life.

And who I was in my past life.

After today, I'll spend more time with my children, talk with them more, play with them more.

That way, I won't let this mistake repeat itself.

But no matter how careful, no matter how clear minded, sometimes the body can't control itself.

Since in the memory of my past life, there are probably other terrible scars that I still don't remember.

I want to explain to my wives that.

That way if I act unreasonable again, they could come to my aid.

"It's very, very important."

I won't disappoint again.

Holding on to that belief, we head to the bedroom.

Part 5

Four years passed.

Eris has passed on to Ars "Longsword of Light".

Sword God Style Saint Level.

Water and Fire Magic Advanced Level.

Even though he's not very good at healing magic, in chantless magic he has reached Intermediate Level.

Because he was held back a grade, he couldn't graduate on stage, but he still scored very highly.

On his graduation, I asked Ars, have you become an adult that can stand on your own two feet yet? Are you mentally and physically prepared to protect Aisha?

Ars said he didn't know.

But reflecting on what happened, and he understood that it could not have continued. Yet he still loved Aisha the same as those days, he'll keep working hard, he answered.

Pleased by his answer, I said, "I'm waiting for you."

Ars gasped in surprise.

And loudly he shouted, "Yes!"

Then he raced toward Asura Kingdom to marry Aisha, who had already graduated and currently working under Ariel.

In four years, Aisha had changed slightly as well.

She now works hard to empathize with others.

No longer just pinging for their weaknesses, speaking selfishly less often, no longer constantly scheming, and tries to look for the best solution rather than only that which was most efficient.

In a way, Aisha no longer has that sharp edge she once had.

But the current Aisha no longer tries to use everyone around her to her own advantage, and no longer pressures people just to get things done.

I think this is also personal growth.

The couple settled down in the City of Magic Sharia and bought a house.
Ars, Aisha, and Leroy are living together there.
Of course, they maintained a warm relationship with my house.
They'll often visit, and we always welcome them here.

Like before, Aisha would busy herself on housework, tending her gardens.
But she no longer wears her maid uniform.

Never again would she wear a maid uniform.

Aisha had finally become an adult.

[Nanahoshi Gourmet]

Chapter 23: Yaki Onigiri

Chapter 24: Miso Noodle Soup

Chapter 25: Sandwich

Chapter 26: Takoyaki

